Tales from Turkistan

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A Scythian's Stories

BY

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PREFACE.

It is fairly certain that my reader is a Scythian himself, for the very good reason that few but those of Scythian descent would read stories of this sort.

This being so, these crude pictures of the dim wild land whence his savage Scandinavian ancestors came, may lead him to a truer appreciation of the staunchness and loyalty of those almost unknown Scythian tribes that live between the Jhelam and Jamrud.

He should remember that in all the history of the King's ships and the King's regiments, no deed, not even that of Sir Richard Grenvile, excels the astonishing defence of the Kabul Residency, which is the crowning glory of the senior Corps of that stark unconquered land.

From this it is an easy step forward to the understanding of how, in the bloody years of the Grande Epoque, those loyal Scythian

villages were bled white, giving all their men to the call of their Race, till in three days' march through the land you could see only women, children, and greybeards.

Now, then, is the time for the descendant of the Norman, the Dane, the Jute, the Saxon, and the Angle to examine his conscience and ask himself whether he will allow that handful of primitive and unassuming tribes, who stood by him in the dark days of 1857 and of 1914, to be blotted out by a flood of baseness and decadence by his enemies and theirs.

Nearly all these stories are true: the remainder are made up of episodes which actually happened.

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THE SCHOONER AND THE SOVIET

THE SCHOONER AND THE SOVIET.

I.

THUD-SWISH. The little pole-masted schooner staggered and quivered as she took it green over the weather-rail, and the high-booted Turkoman helmsman met the seas bracing himself against the kick of the brass-sheathed tiller.

All the forenoon the wind had backed and veered to the swinging of the stumpy booms and the rattle of their sheet-blocks on the rusty iron hawses. Now it had settled down definitely to blow from the south-eastward, raising a short and uncomfortable sea. To the southwards, as the leaden clouds lifted here and there, one could descry purple peaks, tipped with gleaming snow, of the sea-board of Gilan and Mazanderan.

Elsewhere, to the north, the west, and the east, the grey skies lowered over an empty waste of chill desolate waters, flecked with sea-horses.

The subaltern, sitting wedged under the binnacle, seemed to feel that the gloomy scene needed an antidote, and set himself out to provide one by humming—

"Zaftra, zaftra, nichevo,
Zaftra, zaftra,
Za-aftra, z-a-a-aftra,
Slava Bogu nichevo."

Without a second's hesitation, a raven-tressed Astrakhan-capped damsel, who had till then been sitting on the coach-house roof of the schooner, inhaling a swift succession of slender cigarettes, snatched a loose iron belaying-pin from the mainmast rack beside her, and hove it with quite unfeminine force and accuracy at the subaltern. That officer ducked, and the missile, glancing off the binnacle-lid, struck the helmsman a shrewd blow on his snub Mongoloid nose. He uttered a hoarse roar of rage, bellowed in his Turkish patois for one of his mates, shifted his grip on the heaving tiller-head, and whipping a single-edged ivory-hilted *pichaq* from its green shagreen sheath, prepared to avenge his outraged proboscis as soon as his relief should arrive.

A shout of joy went up from the fore-hatch, where six blue-eyed Pathan soldiers of the subaltern's following had been sitting

playing their uncivilised poker, which they termed "flush." The guffaw became a gurgle as the poker-party threw itself in a mass of khaki arms and legs on to the helmsman's relief, who struggled vainly up through the hatchway.

The tall Cossack girl had by now selected a second belaying-pin for the benefit of the subaltern, who dodged behind the protection of the foresail, and added to the lady's annoyance by singing—

"Ya Tatar, Ya Tatar,
Ya nie Russki chielovek."

She, addressing him in icily polite French phrases as "mon capitaine," invited him to come out from behind the sail. When she was really annoyed with him his rank would go up, even to that of "voiskovoi starshina," the Cossack equivalent for a major. As a matter of fact, he really was a captain, but concealed the fact, because he said it made him feel so old.

The monotony of the afternoon had been dispelled.

It is but a matter for speculation now as to whether the helmsman would have let go the tiller and sacrificed thereby his pro-

fessional pride, and probably some of the schooner's canvas, in his desire for vengeance.

However, the lid of the companion-way in the coach-house roof lifted, to disclose the dignified countenance and burly shoulders of the grizzled Risaldar from Jhelum, who spent much of his time getting the subaltern out of trouble.

He sized up the situation swiftly. In his courteous Jhelum way he invited the Cossack damsel's attention to the fact that Private Bloggs had made ready the samovar, which was now a-boiling in the cuddy.

Xenia Dimitrievna's anger melted, as it always did at the sight of the Risaldar's benign fatherly countenance. She, addressing him as Babushka, allowed him to assist her down the ladder.

The helmsman's wrath was half evaporated already, and melted away altogether, to the benefit of the schooner's course, when the Risaldar patted that worthy on the back and whispered some choice Persian gem into his ear about the arrow of mischance and the hand of loveliness.

The Turkoman failed to comprehend, but grinned pleasantly to show that there was now no ill-feeling whatever, and resheathed

his weapon. The old officer then worked his way slowly to the fore-hatch, released the second Turkoman sailor from the mass of Pathan soldiery on top of him, and sedately, impartially, and without heat, clumped the ears of each youth in turn.

Good order and military discipline now having been restored aboard the schooner *Tamerlane*, he followed his subaltern into the cuddy, where the fair Xenia and the Turkoman *naukhoda* or skipper were already busy with the samovar tea that Private Bloggs had made ready.

Private Bloggs was a quaint little figure as he stood by the cuddy-door in a service-dress jacket of khaki serge, its buttons brightly polished in spite of the sea-air, neatly-creased trousers, and a jauntily-rolled Balaclava cap. On the jacket were the shoulder titles of a Fusilier regiment, and the ribbons of both the D.C.M. and the Military Medal.

Private Bloggs had a bit of a history. He was left an orphan at a tender age, and spent his youth in the care of an old and crabbed uncle. The uncle was a Punjabi Musalman, native to Rawalpindi, and an ex-colour havildar of the Duchess of Con-

naught's Own Zhob Rifles. He had left the Service on his microscopic pension to take over the business of a transport contractor and camel-owner in the town of Sandemanpur, the capital of the border province of Kakaristan, where he drove a flourishing trade towards the Durani city of Ghiljihar. The uncle thought very little of the orphan nephew, whom he considered weedy and unlikely to grow up a credit to him in the ranks of the Duchess of Connaught's Own.

The nephew resented this, and at last, in 1912, with a young companion, ran away to sea. Together they worked their way in a stokehold to Marseilles. Young Punjabis are no uncommon objects in the engine-rooms and stokeholds that ply between Marseilles and the East Indies, though, curiously enough, they never serve as deck-hands, these being always Indians. They landed at Marseilles, and decided for London. This meant a long journey on foot through the length and breadth of France. After weeks of trudging, helped by the kindly French peasantry, they reached a Channel port, and again worked their passages to England. More tramping found them in the great city, whose streets, as they well knew, were paved with gold.

They separated, and our young Odysseus found employment as a scullion in the Berkelton. In due course he was promoted to be a waiter in its famous grill-room, and one day he chanced to attend upon a lady who recognised him as a Punjabi. She spoke to him, and at length, being mindful of kindnesses and hospitality received from Punjabis, arranged that he should be sent to school in Shropshire. Next autumn the Great War broke out, and our young wanderer was rising seventeen. Fired with tales of fighting, he ran away from school, to meet a recruiting-sergeant in Trafalgar Square. That plump non-commissioned officer, having inquired his age, stated that seventeen was too young.

Ten minutes later he met another. There were several about in London just then. He had become over eighteen.

Before many months had elapsed he found himself with his company in the front line in France, and he himself on sentry in a small listening-post close to the German wire. At midnight his corporal heard a shot. As he crawled up to inquire what it was about, the young Punjabi pointed out the corpse of a man he had just killed, five yards outside

the sap. They brought in the dead body, and found it to be that of a British officer of another regiment. The Punjabi was immediately placed under arrest, and the matter reported to the company commander.

When the Punjabi was called upon to account for having shot this unidentified captain, he suggested searching the body. This was done, and resulted in the finding of papers which showed the dead man to have been a German disguised in the uniform of a deceased British officer. The youth was immediately released from arrest, and congratulated by the colonel himself. "But how did you know he was a German, young man?" inquired that officer. "I saw his legs, sir, against the rising moon. No British officer ties his puttees like that," was the reply. Some weeks afterwards the Punjabi was gazetted to a Military Medal. All flesh being grass at the Western Front in those days, our Punjabi rifleman, known by now as Bloggs, soon found himself in the bight of a canvas trough, and suffering from lead-poisoning with nickel attachment. When he came out of hospital the lad gradually awakened to the fact that, by some exploit of the Adjutant-General's branch, from having been

a rifleman he was now a Fusilier, attached to the Machine-Gun Corps. He was long past the stage when any vagaries of a third echelon or a record office could upset him, so in due course returned to Picardy behind a Vickers gun in a limbered wagon. After Cambrai he was again wounded, and found himself the proud wearer of a D.C.M. as well. His third venture in search of the bubble reputation took him to Palestine, where he was employed on G.H.Q. intelligence police.

From here it was a short way to the Army of the Black Sea, the Caucasus, and the little schooner aboard of which we made his acquaintance. Jehan, for such was his real name, had gravitated quite naturally into the position of orderly and bâtman to the subaltern. Besides his official duties, he had definitely decided that his officer needed a keeper, and appointed himself to that arduous task, mainly on the strength of his own seafaring experience. Every now and then, his grey-green eyes filled with a worried look and his wavy brown hair rumpled with much cogitation, he would take the latest problem affecting the welfare of his officer to the old Risaldar for advice and solution.

The subaltern owed his selection for intelligence duty to a vacuous face, brushed-back hair, and an eye that reflected a mind engaged somewhere else. This infantile attitude had been the Waterloo of quite a number of swarthy middle-Eastern intriguers of all sorts, whose minds were too complex and ways too dark and involved to notice that officer's simple and obvious arrangements for their benefit. He himself called that his "idiot-boy" method.

The "idiot-boy" method, however, did not suit the ordinary humdrum routine of military, or rather of departmentalised military, existence. This was where Jehan and the old Risaldar came in.

Having steered him through many clashes with the highly developed rituals of the supply, ordnance, and Adjutant-General's branches, they felt safer now that they had him afloat and out of reach of D.A.A. and Q.M.G.'s, Army Forms, and Returns in quadruplicate.

Our little ship's company were bound on a mission destined to gain touch not only with a Voisko of Cossacks, but with the remote Khanate of Khorasm, whose ruler had instinctively sided with the loyal commanders.

To him the subaltern and his men carried rifles and ammunition. Five hundred of our old but trusty long Lee-Enfields and a hundred thousand rounds lay in chests in the schooner's hold. Five-and-twenty camel-loads were these, and in such warfare five-and-twenty score stand of arms were no small accretion of strength. It was too much to hope that a convoy could be escorted by a dozen men across a thousand miles of desert to the Cossack Ataman. To him the subaltern was to carry a very secret résumé of the strategic plans of the White armies. This was bound in lead, like a naval signal-code, and interleaved with thin sheets of celluloid. Whether by land or by sea, it could be destroyed in a twinkling if capture threatened.

These plans were to be translated in secret to the Khan, so that both he and the Ataman could fall in with the big forward move of all the White forces, and time their attacks to the best advantage to the general strategy.

If any of the rifles or ammunition could be got across to the Cossack Voisko, so much the better. At any rate, for them the plan was the main thing.

Wireless plant that could signal over the

thousand miles that hindered their efforts was clearly too much for such a tiny desperate forlorn hope to carry. It must be borne in mind that not only were there vast spaces of almost untrodden desert before them, whose salt sandhills changed their contour with every day's wind, but it was known that the infrequent brackish water-holes were held by enemy posts. There were at least two lines of these to be penetrated.

Instead of wireless, a young N.C.O. of the party, Havildar Atti Afzal, carried a basket of carrier-pigeons. Afzal was a Yusafzai, a cheery race who can do wonders in the training of their little feathered friends, whether fighting partridge, quail, gamecock, or dove.

It is nothing uncommon for a young Yusafzai to carry a quail under his arm through long days of marching without any one suspecting that the bird is there.

The carrier-pigeons were somewhat of a forlorn hope in themselves, a slender reliance; but the whole venture was a desperate one, much more likely to lead to the destruction of every man than to achieve its object. The game was worth the candle, the subaltern thought. Better take a ten to one chance of losing a dozen lives from

thirst in the desert or from the enemy's fire, than incur the certain loss of the efforts of several thousand rifles and sabres.

By a piece of real good-fortune, he had fallen in with a portion of his own Corps. From it he had picked his men, and he knew that they were of the kidney that would stand by their leader closer than a brother.

II.

The fair Xenia Dimitrievna, pouring out the many glasses of lemon-tinged tea, maintained a steady fire of lively raillery with her three companions.

A quip in Persian to the Risaldar followed a pretty little speech in her quaint Kurdified Turkish to the skipper, and mingled with these were admonitions and threats in Russian or French to the subaltern.

Life was never dull when Xenia was about. She thought nothing of livening up a dinner-party with a snap-shot at a lamp or a window from the long-barrelled .380 she affected, hung in a black Mexican slip studded with tiny silver roses.

Her presence in the little party was ex-

plained by an intimate knowledge of the Russified city of Beshkent and its surroundings, where she had been a High School girl. Beshkent is the capital of Tataristan, the scene of this yarn.

She knew, of course, many of the *çi-devant* inhabitants of the country—officers, merchants, officials, and owners of estates in the beautiful foothills to the east and south-east. She knew the ins-and-outs of local politics and officialism. The subaltern's Russian, acquired in a pre-war big-game shoot in the remoter parts of Tataristan, was pretty fluent but ungrammatical, and far from adequate to engage in bluffing matches, or the higher diplomacy, with Red Commissars. Her value as an interpreter was beyond price, since in addition to the phrases of the salon and the ballroom, several years of camps had acquainted her with soldiers' jargon in French and Turkish, as well as her own native Little Russian. She could describe an Austin armoured-car or a synchronised aeroplane Vickers gun in any of these languages with an ease that told of an intricate history, and a *soupçon* of profanity that made it clear to the dullest.

This history only came to the subaltern's

ears in jerky little anecdotes or disjointed allusions to Sarykamish or to fighting on the Stokhod. He never pressed for more details: a certain intuition told him that he might ask too much. He realised little by little that some of her war experience, the more sedate portion, was acquired in aid-posts on the Erzeroum front. The Russian V.A.D. was not restrained from the trenches as in our own more prosaic armies, and Xenia Dimitrievna had made an early acquaintance with first-hand bloodshed. In fact once, in a fit of confidence, she had opened her khaki rubashka and shown the subaltern the scar of a Kurdish kinjal on the swell of a milk-white breast.

Her battle experiences had not ended there. When ordered fronts broke up and armies disrupted under the gangrene from the back areas, she had found herself in a high-peaked Cossack saddle on a shaggy Kalmuk pony following a column of the famous Savage Division. In that unkempt array of sheepskinned men of Kuban, Terek, the Don, the steppes of Krim and the hills of Daghestan, "Part Two" orders and many-columned daily states were not considered indispensable for defeating the enemy. Before long, then,

Xenia's adventurous spirit took her away from the ragged mounted ambulance party to a hardly less rough-and-ready machine-gun Otryad. Here, besides a band of volcanic Georgians and Mingrelians and other coteries from Abkhasia, Circassia and Oset, she forgathered with a large mess of compatriots from Mazeppa's country. In time her quick wits and deft fingers brought her into the proud position of No. 1 of her gun, and fortune brought her several promising targets, dealt with, it is understood, not unjustly. She was happy here, wearing the red, white, and blue chevron of the volunteer army on her left sleeve and the machine-gunner's kinjal at her belt.

The wind had moderated during the afternoon, the sky was clear, even abnormally so, and the subaltern hoped for a calm sea and a fair breeze. But the Naukhoda was not optimistic. He scorned such a thing as a barometer, yet with quaint flappings of his large ears, sniffs, snorts, and expectorations, he prognosticated a blow.

Somewhere about what the soldiers called twenty-four hours, it arrived. A sudden shriek of wind, creaking and groaning of gear, and a flapping of canvas like rapid fire from a duck-gun, announced its arrival.

The skipper had remained on deck; he double-manned the great tiller, and bellowed for all hands. His roar carried above the howling of the squall and the crash of the seas against the little ship's bluff bows. Soon enough the stocky, ungainly-looking seamen had taken in the jib, and were labouring like demons to close-reef main and foresails. The soldiers lent a hand, in the intervals of doubling to the lee-rail to feed the fishes. Here a group of four or five hauled unaccustomedly on a throat halyard, and there a couple helped to secure the upturned skiff to the cabin roof.

None of the soldiers had seen more than a moderate blow, and from the decks of a five-thousand-ton ship. In this creaking ill-found cockle-shell the situation seemed awe-inspiring as the seas creamed and surged along the lee-rail, and as mast whipped and shrouds sang, whilst the cross-trees seemed nearly to dip into the very crests of the seas. Matters eased when canvas was reduced. Even so, under close-reefed mainsail and foresail and forestaysail, the schooner *Tamerlane* forged through the waters, plunging her bowsprit under every few seconds.

The wind was violent and the shallowness

of the water had caused short steep seas that tried both vessel and crew harder than would have the long rollers of the ocean. All hands wished for the dawn as they clung to the sides of their rough bunks. At last it came, and with it a moderation of the blast. Though the wind dropped, so did the temperature. The skipper opined that their troubles were not yet over, even as the seas diminished during the forenoon.

They soon got a glimpse of the sun, and the ship became steady enough for a fire to be lit, to cook a sorely-needed meal. Xenia Dimitrievna appeared again to do the honours of the cuddy, with a brave face in spite of a certain paleness about her normally sun-kissed cheeks.

By noon all had eaten, and the schooner rose and fell over the lazy swells, once more under a full spread of canvas.

A certain murkiness of the surface of that central Asian sea now developed into a very definite fog. The Naukhoda greeted this new trouble with strange oaths. He received little sympathy from the subaltern and the rest of the party: in fact the Risaldar told him plainly that he, being the chief mariner, was clearly responsible for the weather conditions.

The wind had now dropped to a faint breeze that barely gave the schooner steerageway as she rolled, booms rattling and gear creaking, over the slow oily swells.

A couple of hours or so passed thus. Then one of the soldiers, who had been crouching on look-out by the heel of the bowsprit, came quietly aft to the subaltern. He invited him to listen to the northward, over the weather-bow. A word silenced the talk in their own craft, and soon the subaltern was able to hear a slow steady throb.

The Naukhoda could hear it too, and after a while announced that it was the beat of a propeller. In a few minutes an occasional thud and clank added itself to the regular rhythm.

Then all was silent again. The fog seemed to have shut off the sound like a drop-curtain.

This was exciting. In that area the ship they heard could hardly be a friendly one. Our vessels had no business there. Before they sailed our S.N.O.'s secretary had informed the subaltern that all enemy ships except two were duly accounted for, and those two were far away on the north-western coasts. Still, the approaching vessel was more likely to be an enemy than a

friend: possibly the ice of the Bielya estuary had melted prematurely and released one or two of the craft known to be frozen up in it. The subaltern hardly liked the prospect of a possible abrupt termination to his real task. He reflected that he ought to avoid an encounter, especially with a steamer that was certain to carry an armament many times more powerful than the rifles of his tiny force. His mission was much more important than any success they could hope to gain. Still, he had little choice in the matter. If the fog should lift, as it threatened to do, the weakest steamer could destroy him at sight, with the stem, if not by gun-fire or torpedo. The boldest course was the safest. He would instruct the skipper to put the schooner alongside the steamer and attack her. The subaltern realised that this was a grave decision to take, but, on the other hand, he knew how much stomach the Reds had for a hand-to-hand fight.

In a whisper he called up the Risaldar, his three section commanders, and the old Turkoman sailor. His orders were brief enough.

The soldiers were to be under cover of the weather-rail, with bayonets fixed and

grenades detonatored. One section of the three was to remain in the schooner, using their fire to assist the other two, the boarding sections. The Risaldar was to take charge of this covering fire party, and to use every effort to pick off any man who seemed to be a leader amongst the enemy, and especially the crews of any gun or machine-gun that might attempt to open fire.

The Turkoman crew were to stand by with their sabres drawn to back up the boarders. Two, however, including the mate, were to have lashings in their hands to secure the schooner to the enemy as soon as their sides touched. Two more were detailed to the engine-room, to prevent the engineers handling their throttles or reversing-gear.

The subaltern stood by the skipper's elbow, who himself held the tiller. They moved slowly so, almost drifting for ten minutes, that seemed as many hours.

Suddenly the clamour seemed to be turned on as by a tap. From the invisible vessel, above the slow vibrations of her engine, came shouts and the gibber of harsh voices. They could hear snatches of seemingly drunken song, and then quite clearly a scream of "Ya Bolsheviki."

There was no time to guess what it meant. The subaltern glanced at the row of set faces and fixed bayonets along the low bulwark, then a black shape sheered up out of the fog, and they caught the sickly sweet smell of half-burnt "Mazut" fuel.

What followed came briskly enough. The schooner's masts rattled again as her sides met the black steel of the enemy.

The men were aboard like a flash, and a volley broke out from the covering section. By great good-fortune the enemy's sides were but two or three feet higher than the schooner's rail. The subaltern found a broad savage yellowish face in front of him. He remembered distinctly, but very slowly it seemed, how he ought to aim at his opponent's waist on these occasions. Somehow the broad yellow face floated alone in a sort of mist, and it had no waist. He then became conscious of the smell of cordite from his own pistol, and the face, which had till then filled all his world, suddenly was not. Then matters cleared up a little. The Risaldar was lugging his sword from out of the blue-and-white striped jersey that covered the chest of a Red sailor who had jumped to the breech of the enemy's midship gun.

The subaltern's own men were at his elbows thrusting to right and left, pressing a crowd of bluejackets towards the bows of their ship. The schooner was lashed to the other vessel's stern, but the bowfasts seemed to have parted. Two loud crashes roared out, as grenades were thrown down the hatches of the engine-room and stokehold.

All at once resistance melted away. Two or three grimy sailors shrieked as the long bayonets lunged into their bodies that crouched beneath gun-mountings or torpedo-tubes.

. . . . . .

The subaltern's first desire, after the din had quietened, was to indulge in recriminations with the Risaldar for taking his party off the schooner and aboard the enemy. The Risaldar anticipated him by pointing out that as the bowfast had parted, the vessels' foreparts had swung away from each other, so that the fire of the covering party had become masked by the boarders themselves.

The captured ship proved to be a large sea-going torpedo-boat, and though she was of antique build, the soldiers were very pleased to have captured her from a small schooner.

The wounds of the attackers were trivial. Afzal bared his brawny shoulder for a swab of iodine and field-dressing where a pistol-bullet had ploughed a neat furrow along the deltoid. Xenia, to the subaltern's annoyance, appeared with a knife-slash on the back of her hand. He had forgotten to make arrangements to keep her below during the fight. The Turkoman seaman whose nose had stopped the flight of Xenia's belaying-pin the day before, now had that same organ converted into a pulpy mass by a blow from the butt of a rifle. He was at that moment being held down by four of his friends in order to prevent him from wreaking summary vengeance on the pinioned sailor who had done the deed.

Sentries had already been posted over the various hatchways, and the subaltern observed that the one over the engine-room was unnecessary, since both engineers had been killed by a grenade, and their bodies sprawled messily over the gratings of the starting-platform.

The stokehold was empty. A glance, however, into the tiny wardroom showed several occupants. First up the ladder there came to meet the British officer a naval lieutenant,

whom he had known in former years at the Russian Embassy in London. This was indeed a strange encounter, and the sailor made several gallant attempts to kiss the subaltern. Next came a tall, broad-shouldered young officer in the khaki serge jacket and blue pipings of a Guards regiment. He was introduced by the sailor as Prince Rokhalski.

The third inhabitant of the little den did not seem very keen to leave it. As he hesitated, the sailor let drive with a hurricane of emblematical Russian, and then the figure crawled on hands and knees to the ladder. As it turned upwards on the bottom rungs, the light, striking downwards, showed a broad yellow face, now tinged with the greeny-grey of abject terror. Thick lips slavered and dripped below a fleshy nose. The high cheek-bones and double eyelids betrayed the Mongol, and the object gibbered to itself in Yiddish as it climbed and floundered on the ladder. Helped by a rude hand on the scruff of the neck, it arrived in a cowering heap on the deck.

The sailor explained briefly to the subaltern that this was a Red naval commissar, bound on a special mission to Bielovodsk port. This excursion was arranged for the

execution of Prince Rokhalski, the passenger. The commissar did not know that the Imperial officers knew that the Guardsman's fate had been arranged, so he was allowed to travel in the wardroom, as if all had been straightforward. The wretch, who had many murders to his credit, did not seem to need a sentry, so a clove hitch secured his wrists behind his back. Then all four officers and the Naukhoda made their way over the littered steel decks, slippery with blood, to where the fo'c'sle hatch opened under the forward whaleback. There Private Bloggs was busy bumping the butt of his rifle on to the fingers of unrestful inmates as they tried to climb out, whilst he threatened, in a curious Persian jargon of his own, to bayonet the first man up.

The Russian officers explained that several of the sailors were loyal and could be trusted, and the naval lieutenant, Mitchmanoff, undertook to separate the sheep from the goats as they came up on deck. Accordingly a row of grimy figures, still clad in the blue-black serge, blue-and-white striped jerseys, and gold-lettered caps of the old Imperial Navy, were soon lashed to the stanchions of the weather-rail, whilst the loyalist force

was increased by the useful addition of seven seamen. Three most useful stokers were included: useful because they understood the steam blast of the Mazut burners in the little craft's furnaces. The prisoners amounted to seventeen including the commissar, of whom three were badly wounded, and five of their dead lay on the deck.

The bodies were quickly overboard, and it was decided to batten down the captives in a small compartment of the ward-room, which had been a small-arms store.

The Russian officers expressed a wish to deal with the commissar more adequately and promptly. The subaltern declined to be a party to any out-of-hand hangings, but Prince Rokhalski explained that a Field General Court Martial might be convened by the senior officer present.

No sooner said than done, and the three officers sat to decide Isaac Ruvovski's fate. Several sailors gave evidence, and the issue was not long in doubt.

Then there was a hitch. The loyalist bosun's mate pointed out that the torpedo-boat's yard-arm was far from strong enough to support the seventeen or eighteen stone of the stumpy but obese prisoner, even if

the signal halliards, the only longish line available, would stand it.

Mitchmanoff suggested that if the gig were lowered into the water and passed astern on a painter, the vacant davits would provide an excellent medium for executing the sentence.

Fortunately for the feelings of the spectators, Ruvovski's weight made matters short and sweet, in spite of the brief drop, and although the bosun's mate refused him the luxury of a little grease on his noose.

This cleared the air a bit, though it did not comfort the sixteen surviving prisoners at all. Then the subaltern had to decide on the disposal of his prize. It was obvious at once that the schooner would have to remain with the party, since the band of Turkoman, who were to meet the mission at an appointed secret spot amongst the sand-dunes south of Fort Petropavlovsk, would not recognise them. They would certainly not display their prearranged signal to a torpedo-boat. He decided, after a word with Mitchmanoff, that the prize should get under steam and tow the schooner to the rendezvous. This would quicken matters up, since time was important, for the sixteen prisoners had to be disposed of.

Here the Naukhoda's local knowledge came in. The subaltern had declined to make the whole party walk the plank, but there was a low sandy uninhabited island some ten miles from the coast to the eastwards, whereon was a spring of drinkable water. This would form an ideal home from home for the sixteen, where they might practise State ownership to the top of their bent.

The difficulty was to navigate the little steam vessel in default of engineers. The three stokers would answer, they said, for the boiler-room, but engines made them all of a dither.

A brief visit showed the machinery to be plain and simple enough, and even if elderly, a brass plate set out that it had been built by a first-class firm of shipbuilders in the South of England.

The engines were three-cylinder compound, with a simple link reversing-gear, driving a single screw. By good-fortune the condenser was of the surface type on the outer skin of the vessel. The little party of officers explained the plan to the Naukhoda, and decided to chance it. The Turkoman mate remained in the schooner with a couple of men, and a grass rope was passed to him.

The skipper, the bosun's mate, and Mitchmanoff would take the watches on the bridge, with both the Russian and Turkoman seamen to assist them. The two soldier officers rashly undertook watch and watch in the engine-room, assisted by Havildar Afzal, who had picked up some weird mechanical knowledge in his murky past. The two locomotive boilers in the stokehold were given in charge of the three loyal stokers, and the Risaldar was bidden take over the balance of the soldiers to fight the ship if need be. Xenia took command of the ward-room, whilst a Tatar cabin-boy cooked for the crew.

The boilers were soon under steam again, and with the schooner in tow, Mitchmanoff shaped a course for Fort Petropavlovsk. As the needles danced round in the pressure-gauges, the subaltern and Prince Rokhalski bustled about in the engine-room, lubricating everything that seemed as if it wanted oil, quite regardless of expense.

Soon the gauges showed 80 lb., and with a farewell sort of hand-shake to his coadjutor, the subaltern gingerly opened the throttle-valve. With a rumble and something of a clank the engine began to turn, slowly at first, with some gasping and sizzling, then

faster, and the slow rolling and plashing of the water against the vessel's skin gave place to a steady motion as the water flowed briskly past. The engine-room staff gave a small cheer, and pretended not to hear the clanking. The subaltern suddenly dashed aft with an oil-can as he remembered the thrust-blocks and their need for lubrication. As he sighed with relief at finishing this, both soldiers jumped to the sound of an unearthly voice coming from some corner of the empty engine-room.

Rokhalski caught sight of a brass bell-mouthed pipe, and found Mitchmanoff's voice exuding from it.

He congratulated the amateur engineers when they answered his inquiries about progress in their department, and suggested some simple manœuvres. The telegraph was easy enough to understand and worked well, but the subaltern decided to start with some handling of the reversing-gear. After a time, by linking up, they found the position at which the engines turned fastest for the 120 lb. of steam she was now getting, and soon the craft were doing a good ten knots. The rubicund face of a stoker showed down the hatch, and inquired if they wanted any

more steam. He added his congratulations to those of the lieutenant, and pointed out that another voice-pipe ran to the boiler-room.

He then approached the subject of forced draught, pointing to a fan and a U-shaped glass pressure-gauge full of tea, mounted on the bulkhead. This was too much for the Guardsman, who told him to go and lose himself where the forced draught would be useful for cooling purposes.

A suggestion, up the voice-pipe, that the reverse should be tried was answered by a howl of anguish from the bridge. Mitchmanoff explained that the schooner was still in tow, a point they had overlooked.

A little later, however, the lieutenant, emboldened by this rapid progress, rang off his engines and cast off the tow. He would try some manœuvring, said the voice-pipe. Khaki jackets came off, and for twenty minutes or so the gong sounded, and the telegraph clanged round to every position. The two soldiers sprang to reversing-wheel and throttle, stopped, reversed, went to half speed, full speed, and dead slow in turns. At the end of this time, brows being well mopped, Mitchmanoff announced that the

schooner was in tow once more. Keeping comfortably inside their capabilities, the little convoy resumed its course to the north-eastward.

The subaltern, after a brief refreshment, betook himself on deck to see how the Risaldar was getting on with the guns.

The torpedo-tubes they decided to leave alone for the present. Both were loaded, and one of the seamen was qualified in their handling.

The vessel mounted three six-pounder Hotchkiss, and these were so simple in their mechanism that a few minutes' drill put all the men abreast of it.

Projectiles and cartridges stood in racks on deck, and the hatch to the magazine, in the wardroom floor, was open. Besides the six-pounders, she carried two old-pattern Maxims and a German Parabellum, mounted for anti-aircraft fire, on a sort of embryonic after-bridge.

They drilled for an hour at their guns, then a welcome smell of cooking spread over the ship; evening closed in peacefully, and soon the watch below were rolled in blankets, dreaming of the sharp day's work.

Bright and early next day they drilled

again at the guns, whilst the seamen cleaned up a good many odd corners that seemed to need it.

The men got on so well with their gun-drill, and grasped the deflection scales and allowance for speeds, that the subaltern and Mitchmanoff agreed that a little target practice would do no harm. There was plenty of ammunition aboard, so a cask was put over the side, the tow cast off again, and a volley of expletives wafted up from the engine-room hatch as Rokhalski realised that he was in for another spell of brisk work at the throttle and reversing-wheel. The torpedo-boat turned to port and starboard, increased to full and shut down to slow as the little guns barked in turn. After the first few rounds the men became used to the unaccustomed noise and recoil, and the shot splashed fountains around the target. Let us forget about the shell which for some unexplained reason went through the schooner's main-sail. They ceased fire after about a dozen rounds from each gun, well enough pleased, and confident that they could score hits on any Red vessel they might meet.

That afternoon they sighted the low sand-dunes of the island of Biyuk Ada.

The sixteen prisoners came out from their little snuggery to make two voyages in the gig. A couple of cases of Chicago beef and three sacks of biscuits accompanied them.

The Naukhoda pointed out the spring, the gig was hoist again to its davits, and they were left to cogitate over Marxism and murder, whilst the little trail of the torpedo-boat's smoke melted on the horizon.

Next day they hoped to sight the coast of the mainland. Neither Mitchmanoff nor the Naukhoda were too sure of their reckoning, so it was arranged that after the landfall the torpedo-boat would drop anchor, whilst the schooner sailed up and down the coast looking out for the secret signal.

The subaltern had at first intended to scuttle the torpedo-boat, but Mitchmanoff pointed out that with his eight hands he could just about navigate her back to a friendly port.

The soldiers were desperately cut up at not being able to steam her into their own port as a prize, but they had their own business to attend to. As an offset they had carefully preserved the vessel's ensign, which was destined to make a regimental trophy in the far-off valley of Peshawar. Afzal,

with an eye to bloodshed, secured the little Parabellum gun as well, having somehow wheedled Mitchmanoff into the admission that it was no use to him. He also managed to acquire a Very pistol and cartridges.

Next day, an hour or two before dusk, both schooner and torpedo-boat together sighted the tiny greyish purple line of sand-dunes that were the mainland of Asia. Standing in with great care and with leadsmen in the chains to about two thousand yards, the torpedo-boat let go her anchor with an irritatingly loud crash, and transhipped the soldiers to the schooner.

They had hardly made a couple of miles of northing in their prearranged cruise up the coast before the skipper himself sighted the signal—three fires in a horizontal line.

This they answered with a green rocket, and, sure enough, a fourth fire was lighted on the right of the three. This made all certain, and in a few minutes the schooner's boat was pulling slowly into shore with Xenia, the skipper, the Risaldar, and the subaltern crowded into her tiny stern-sheets.

The last hundred yards of the passage was too shallow even for the boat, so at once a dozen red-cloaked Yapit Turkoman

splashed out at a gallop, leading spare horses with high-peaked saddles and silver-bossed bridles. Mounted on these they all cantered together through the tall reeds to the shore, and to a camp of a score of fine black-felt tents that lay concealed amongst the sand-hills. The Khan himself came out to meet them, and following the courteous custom of Tataristan, all dismounted ten yards before approaching to shake hands and exchange greetings.

The Khan of the Yapits was a fine sight as he stood welcoming them, in his long mulberry-coloured robe of silk, buttonless, but swathed in about his middle with wide orange scarf.

From beneath peeped crinkled Russian boots, and atop towered a huge beehive-like bonnet of lamb-skin, not black like those of his followers, but white as befitted his rank, and shaped almost like an inverted pear. His face, broad-browed and sedate, with a more aquiline nose and more Western features than most, was a fair index to what the subaltern had heard of his character. A plain, slow-thinking, single-minded man of the remotest heart of Asia, his rejection of treason and rebellion was more a matter of sub-

conscious instinct than of reasoned weighing of rights and wrongs. A steady pair of somewhat obliquely-set brown eyes confirmed that favourable impression. His broad smooth beard almost hid the neck of the khaki jacket worn under the long robe, on the shoulders of which were the forbidden flat Imperial shoulder-strap, wide with silver lace, and adorned with tiny embroidered stars.

A row of enamelled crosses and medals hung from V-shaped ribbons, and the instructed onlooker could tell that a couple of them were the results of campaigns on the Austrian Front.

The new arrivals were led into a couple of the big felt kibitkas spread with rugs, those delightful products of fair Turkoman skill.

They all settled down cross-legged to a shower of hospitable phrases. In due course green tea and polite speeches gave way to a row of men bearing huge platters and trays of stews and pilaos, heaped in profusion and flanked with many dried fruits and sweetmeats. The subaltern could just see through the open door a glimpse of Jehan, his belt loosened and his fingers in a huge dish, swelling visibly, and surrounded by bowls of tea of blue, green and red china.

The sun was shining, and everything seemed rosy. Meanwhile the Khan's men were collecting camels for the morrow's journey, and the seamen were landing the cases of arms.

The whole of the day was spent in the multitudinous preparations for a caravan journey, the making up of loads, the telling-off of drivers, checking of stores and arms, the collecting of leather water-buckets and woollen sacks for grain, tents, spades, and a thousand other essentials. It was no light task that they were essaying, the crossing of nearly five hundred miles of desert, almost waterless, and in a bitter cold that seared the faces of travellers. Picquets watched the camp at night, and all slept with their arms at hand, whilst Mitchmanoff cleared his little vessel for action. A Red post lay only three days' march along the coast to the north, and could well have attacked them.

III.

Next morning the caravan marched out from the little encampment, accompanied for several miles by the Khan and a troop of his men, and by Mitchmanoff. Besides a

dozen Turkoman, who were the drivers of the camels, another ten would march into Khorazm with the subaltern, and this party was in the charge of young Oraz Murad, a nephew of the Khan.

They had all travelled over this route before, knew the wells and the prospects of water at each, and had the desert man's instinct for finding the way to the next patch of scrub when the ever-shifting dunes had swept and wiped away the hardly visible trail. Moreover, the young nephew could speak Persian well and understand a fair amount of Russian.

That day they toiled painfully over the sand-dunes for ten hours. It was a short march, but the subaltern's brain had not yet become attuned to those long hours of monotony and of blankness of mind which he would acquire later on.

One sand-dune was very like another, as they rose in endless waves in their strange curves and ripples from horizon to horizon. Yet there was change. Now a clump of the grotesque saxaul sprang higher against the sky than its predecessors or reminded the wayfarer of some strange beast. Now in a flat clayey hollow would be a thicket of reeds,

or yet again ravens or a hare or two would break the void of the journey. Every bivouac had a little individuality of its own. At one the water would be brackish and fuel almost non-existent, at another there might even be a tiny patch of green grass.

The first camp was, as seems natural, something of a mental landmark. Little details had to be seen to and provided for that afterwards became a routine, little problems to be solved and difficulties adjusted that were soon forgotten or swallowed up in bigger trouble.

Burnak was the name of this first bivouac, which marked a mere muddy brackish pool scarcely three feet across and a few inches deep.

Tea was nasty, and tasted of dead camel. This is a misfortune when tea is your main stimulant and your principal interest in life, but brackish water is a thing to which, within limits, one gets hardened.

Next day's march was a long one, and to save the horses, who floundered at times painfully in the loose sand, the subaltern mounted his men for an hour at a time on the more lightly-loaded camels, and at times they marched on foot. In both morning and

evening the wind was cold, and as they came to higher ground snow lay over midday. Even so the rasping wind cut the flesh with its salt-laden sting, so that no man dared take off a glove for more than a second or two. Every now and then noses and ears, in spite of the sheepskin caps pulled down over them, needed rubbing to drive off impending frost-bite. The men's stirrups had all been wrapped with felt, otherwise frost-bitten toes would have been certain, in spite of the long case-lined felt boots and the periodical trudgings afoot. Day after day went by like this; the passage of one-third of their journey made a point by which to measure their ideas. Then the water became more salt, so that even the copper-lined stomachs of the Turkoman began to reject it. Much thought produced a remedy. Fuel was a-plenty at Yazi Ishem, where the water was at its vilest, so the subaltern, boiling the full of all their caldrons and pots, covered them with towels and cotton cloths. The steam condensed in the cotton coverings, and was hastily squeezed into the water-bags. Great was the joy at this discovery, but it took much digging of saxaul and hours of boiling to produce a very little good water.

Here and there, where snow had drifted, they were able to shovel it into sacks. Where it lay thin, it had been tainted by the all-pervading salt.

As the days went on the horses began to show their ribs, and the camels' humps became small. The men thinned down, and some of them began to look haggard. At the eleventh camp water had been so scarce that none could be carried onward. At the twelfth it was too salt and bitter for any man's drinking; few even of the horses could face it. There was no fuel to be found except a few handfuls of old dry camel-droppings; on these they barely managed to distil a small cupful for each man. The morrow's march was painful, the hours seemed longer, and the dunes softer and steeper than ever before. A pony fell and died at noon; half an hour after him a camel lay down resigned to its certain fate. The labour of redistributing the loads made the matter no easier. The sun was well down towards the horizon when the little patrol that formed their advanced-guard halted just below the crest of a high dune.

The subaltern saw them dismount, and a couple of men crawled up to the cover of a saxaul clump ahead, where they lay in ob-

servation. Then he saw the patrol leader signal, "Enemy in sight."

As he halted the caravan and rode forward to see for himself, the double plop of rifle-shots broke out. The sand-dunes made it impossible to see how many they were opposed by, but every now and then a glimpse of a black-leather coat, or a sheep-skin cap, proclaimed a Red party.

He could not afford to get any severe casualties, so a straight-ahead advance, painfully slow as it must be, was out of the question. The caravan must remain halted; he could not risk that it should be seen. He called up the Risaldar, and sent him with the young Oraz Murad and a dozen men on a detour amongst the sandhills, round what must be the enemy's left. Four remained with the camels, and, watching the slow progress of the flanking party, the remainder pinned the enemy down in front. Every time a head showed, a quick snapshot greeted it, and every time that the enemy was silent two or three of the subaltern's men made a short run forward. This was much assisted by a few bursts of fire from the Parabellum gun. The resourceful Aslam had rigged this up to be carried slung over a riding-saddle,

its weight balancing that of a couple of cartridge-boxes. Though the men were done up with thirst and exhausted with their labour in the clogging sand, they steadily gained ground, and once or twice it seemed that their fire had taken effect. The flanking party was now out of sight, but the subaltern looked steadily in its direction for the red signal light, which would show it ready to go in.

The evening dragged on, and as the dusk came down, they were able to advance less slowly. At last a popple of fire broke out to their right front, and almost at the same instant the red light streamed up against the purpling sky. No one had any clear recollection of what followed: they seemed to stagger on through endless sand, taking standing snapshots at black figures.

Then they seemed to be going down to a hollow, and at once a dozen men hurled themselves at the tiny trickle of muddy water in it. The enemy had vanished, and the Risaldar, holding a rough torch of brushwood, led his men forward. The subaltern's first care was to send a man back on the least exhausted horse to call up the caravan. It was now 10 o'clock: the fight, short as it

seemed, had in fact lasted over six hours. Whilst the camels plodded slowly in, he took stock of the situation. Three of the enemy were dead, and lay sprawled about the dunes; five more were holding out their hands to be lashed together; two were too badly hit to move. The rest had made off, probably towards the next water-hole, thirty miles to the eastward. Four of their camels knelt peacefully chewing the cud, but as he looked at their loads the subaltern realised with horror that their iron water-tanks had been pierced by bullets: about a gallon remained in the bottom of one of them. The water-hole was empty, and some of the men's tongues were already blackened, and in very truth cleaving to the roofs of their mouths. One of the Turkoman had been killed, two slightly wounded, also one of the subaltern's own men, whilst the Risaldar had a bullet graze below the right ear.

Matters were becoming desperate: fortunately the caravan arrived in less than an hour.

The water was carefully partitioned out—a pint each for the wounded and for Xenia, and about the quarter of a cupful for each whole man. This left about a quart in reserve.

The men, the Turkoman taking heart from the unyielding Pathans, were full of determination: they were ready to go on anywhere, thirst or no thirst. For, as soon as he had consulted the Turkoman and young Oraz Murad, the subaltern had decided not to halt, but to push on at all costs to the next water-hole. There could be no halt for the night; the whole party might well break down from thirst where they stayed. Besides, marching at night would be preferable to a day march under these conditions, especially as the fugitives of the Red patrol would be less likely to delay them if followed up at once. Oraz Murad had no doubt about the trail, so on they laboured under a crescent moon. The dead remained where they lay.

If the day's march had been terrible, there are no words to describe that night's torment. As the dawn came up out of the east, they still laboured on like automatons, the wounded threshing from side to side with the motion of their weary camels, and the whole fighting against sleep.

No one remembers how many camels lay down for the last time during that frightful day. Four times did the subaltern remember calling his men to bury arm-chests off dead

beasts, and to cover up the traces. The tents were abandoned, and most of the cooking-gear. Several men fell raving, and were lashed by their more fortunate comrades to already overburdened camels. Towards that second evening the dreary pace grew ever slower; it seemed as if they could never reach their goal. Twice they passed black bundles in hollows of the dunes that were remnants of the enemy.

Once again the vanguard fired a dozen shots, and brought down another. No one bent to see if he were alive or dead. Well after nightfall Oraz Murad gripped the subaltern's arm, pointed to where a rise blacked out some of the stars, and in a voice like a raven's croak, gasped, "Kuyusi, the wells!" The reserve quart of water had already been distributed to the weakest; Afzal refused his share. But even here, after sighting their goal, three men dropped. No one could pick them up. The subaltern decided to send back for them after the rest had reached water. It seemed half a lifetime before they staggered to the well, but the water was good and clear. Even as they drank, two of the enemy appeared on ponies that were at their last gasp. There was no fight in

them; they threw down their weapons without a word.

After drinking, six of the men, carrying filled water-bottles, went back to bring in those left behind. Besides these they even managed to rescue two of the horses.

By two in the morning all were in, had drunk, eaten, and all were sleeping but a single sentry. Matters were now aright. They had, it seemed, jettisoned four arm-chests, but the Khan's men could retrieve those later. The losses in camels were made up for by the fact that they and the horses had eaten three camel-loads, whilst the dead horses were replaced by those of the Reds.

The water they had found, thanks to the wonderful and unerring direction of the Turkoman, would in Europe be considered a tiny foul pool; to them it was ambrosia, sparkling, and abundant. There was even grazing for horses and camels, so they stayed all through that day, and marched again, strengthened and refreshed, at midnight of the next night. Water-bags were full, the march was short, and all the remaining wells were dependable.

Four days on, the accustomed light streak on the evening horizon became a tiny black

line. The tiny black line grew slowly, very slowly, into unmistakable trees. The track broadened, they crossed dry ditches, clumps of reeds, and mounds of baked earth, the handiwork of man.

Soon a dozen tall bonneted Turkoman cantered out to meet them; they had come to the ancient city of Khorazm; the black distant-seeming mass of poplars suddenly sprang up close at hand, and half their task was done.

It was almost too dark that night for the subaltern's eyes to gloat over the towered earthen walls of the long-dreamed-of city, that curved like ships' rams. They rode in, first through rutty lanes between the striated blank pisé walls of orchards, where the silver trunks of serried poplars gleamed in the moon's beams, then under a fairyland blue-tiled gateway. Its arch had that graceful form that is midway between the Norman and the Saracenic, a fair legacy of the great days of old that stamps the cities of Gothic mid-Asia.

Buttressing it to right and left there leapt sheer up two of those unmistakable half-minaret, half-towerlike stalks of baked clay, which resemble the round towers of Ireland.

Great valves of old timber, a foot thick and studded with iron, were tugged open for them with creakings, and they rode between two ranks of tawny-robed riflemen, the Khan's retainers.

Muddy narrow alleys heaped with old snow and flanked with straggling windowless houses led them at long-last to a great court-yard, where flaring torches were reflected in the half-ice of a square central pool.

A silver-bearded dignitary welcomed them here on the Khan's behalf, and in half an hour, refreshed with tea and a meal, every one forgot the cares and troubles of the journey; they slept on piles of felts and silken quilts before the great fires that blazed in the smooth grey-plastered chimney-places set in the angles of the rooms. Next day they rode to their reception by the Khan. The stodgy long-gowned citizens broke out into smiles of welcome as their outriders pressed a way for them through the crowded streets.

They had no eyes for the tiled and arched exterior of the palace, embowered in poplars, but were filled with the expectation of the meeting.

The three officers came into a small un-

ostentatious room, whose floors and walls were nearly hidden by carpets. It impressed them well to see that nothing was gaudy or striking, yet those rugs must have been worth many a camel-load of gold.

The Khan was slightly taller and older than his kinsman: his personality and the welcome that his eyes proclaimed before his lips spoke it gripped them all. They were surely in the hands of a true ally.

This was only the first of many hospitable receptions; but before the day was out the subaltern had declared his mission to the Khan, had made over the rifles, and had carefully explained the gist of his secret book.

The Khan was quick to understand the new plan, and to rejoice at his share in it. There was no doubt that the share would be loyally and heartily carried into action.

He congratulated all the subaltern's following personally on their escape from the perils of the journey, and saw to it that everything was done for the men's comfort.

On the second day, robes of honour arrived, flaming in stripes and blazes of silk of Samarkhara, and a bag of ancient silver, Greek and Persian, as much as two men could lift.

This was for the rank and file, and the subaltern had much ado to combine a polite message of thanks for the gorgeous raiment with a courteous intimation that the men of his Corps could not accept money for doing their duty.

He longed, though, for one or two of those old staters stamped with the Greek superscriptions of Punjabi kings.

It was no great matter to send back for the four arm-chests they had jettisoned in the sand; and when the party had recovered their strength, the time came to tackle the second half of their journey, to the Ataman of Irtysh.

The Khan and his venerable ministers, with their courtly Asian grace, seemed as sorry at their departure as they felt themselves to go, after all too brief a stay in the city whose very name had seemed legendary in the tales of their childhood. The second caravan was far smaller and more manageable, and it was well that it was to be so. Twenty of the great Bactrian camels, whose hair had now lengthened with the approach of winter till it changed the very aspect of the beasts, were enough to carry their wants. Only three of these carried their kits and

a couple of small felt tents; the balance were loaded with grain, meal, and the water gear necessary for the long journey that would cross the Famine Steppe.

The subaltern hoped to be able to send back ten of the camels from a well-known water-pool at about half-way. Whilst they rested in Khorazm, a small caravan had been sent five marches out to make a dump of barley, to ease matters for the main party.

IV.

The Khan himself and several score of his troopers marched out with them for a dozen miles of the first march. They were now hardened to the toils of the desert, and march followed march almost automatically. It was hard indeed to remember for how many days they had travelled, and the subaltern found that he must cut notches in a stick.

This track differed from the last in that it had been used in ancient times, indeed, for many centuries. Few had travelled by it, however, for a generation, since the coming of the railway, far to the south, which had diverted its commerce.

The signs of this were seen in the ruined lining of wells and the tumbled remains of travellers' shelters and shrines, that were often mere tiny heaps of thin flat bricks of the ancient sort, with here and there the glint of a blue Persian tile.

As they progressed, marching a trifle south of east, the sand-dunes became fewer and less toilsome, the browny-yellow herbage more frequent, and the wells deeper.

By the time a dozen notches had appeared in the subaltern's stick, they were using their long raw-hide rope to draw up water. A few more and they had to lower half a camel load of it four hundred feet, a great leathern sack knotted to the end, its mouth held open with a stick. Then the camel would be led away from the great gaping mouth, the upper end of the rope fast to his saddle, and slowly, and with infinite care, the precious bag of water would be hauled up as the beast walked on. It took nearly half an hour to accomplish this, anxious hands saving the rope from chafe or cut at the well's lip.

The deeper wells, to their astonishment, they found lined and revetted with the bones of camels, neatly set together.

In fact, even in the first dozen marches they began to find a litter of bones along the faint trail. As the days went on this gradually thickened into two continuous lines, one on either hand, with here and there the bones of a man amongst the countless skeletons of camels and horses.

They spoke little to each other during those long changeless marches, as they rode slowly with the camels, day in and day out. Perhaps any possible remark had long since been uttered: still Xenia, like the marvel she was, kept some cheering little saying ready every day as they sat down to a bowl of tea after settling into the night's camp.

The eighteenth march was marked by a snowstorm, which came on at midday. Iwwaz Bai, the old retainer, whom the Khan had sent to show the trail, was hard put to it to guide them to the well. The last of the party got in at midnight, exhausted and sore from battling with the shrieking wind, and the lash of the driven snow. Several men were frost-bitten, but by heroic rubbing with snow, so that they screamed with agony, no fingers or toes were lost. By great good-fortune a couple of old brick walls stood at this spot to the height of a man's shoulder,

saving much blast of the blizzard from them.

Next day too was remarkable. The track was overlaid with new snow, but the wise old Iwwaz Bai overcame doubts of the way, guiding them in a manner that was almost uncanny.

When they reached it, the well was of the prodigious depth of over seven hundred feet, as they paced it out along the track of the water-drawing camel. Fortunately it was safe from being frozen over, but it must be imagined with what anxious care every available length of their rope was pieced together, with what ever greater care was it hauled up foot by foot, a man's hand interposed whenever it might rub on a stone. The life of every man depended upon that somewhat scrubby-looking piece of hide. Did they lose much of it by a breakage they might not be able to reach the water in some well ahead. There was hardly any fuel to be found at that bivouac; otherwise they might have melted some snow instead of risking their precious rope.

Then the weather changed for the better, and gave them a spell of comparative and even unseasonable warmth. The snow van-

ished in a day, and they marched over rolling steppes of autumn-tinted herbage. This had not the even colouring of our English downs, but formed a crazy patchwork of rich browns and yellows, streaked with every sort of green, brightened with tiny wild-flowers of every hue, and cut up by grey pebbly ravines. Even the weird, unnatural, gnarled saxaul seemed to take on a more kindly aspect.

So far all had gone well. The men were thin, really thin, once again, but hard-trained to the last ounce, and tanned by snow and sun to the ruddy tint of an autumn beech. Water had always been sufficient both for man and beast; they had achieved warmth in nearly every bivouac; only food had to be cut down to a low margin.

The horses, thanks to the grazing, were surprisingly fit. The grass of the steppes is a wonderful thing. The native horse can be marched without grain, and worked hard almost indefinitely, provided he gets time for a few hours' nibble every day. It is this fact that made possible the invasions of Attila. Quite early one morning they sighted a speck on the horizon. This, old Iwwaz Bai announced, indicated the railway that they were due to cross. It was a water-

tower alongside a lonely station. Perhaps in the old sailing-ship days the vision of the peak of Teneriffe or of Ascension would cause the same interest and excitement that this spectacle afforded our little party.

It took hours of marching before it seemed, in that clear air, to get any closer, and then it appeared wise to the subaltern to alter the direction of march so as to pass well out of sight of it.

Not only that, but he decided to halt till dark in a little fold of ground some three miles from the railway itself. They would then march on and cross it without risking being seen from some chance train. This was, in fact, the immense stretch of line that ran from Beshkent to Moscow, along which two army corps had flowed swiftly northwards in August 1914. Far to the north of where they stood, a force of Cossacks bestrode it, fighting the Reds of Beshkent, denying them communication with the central Soviet. In four hours it was safe to move forward, and that interval the subaltern spent in making ready and putting the final touches on a couple of demolition charges out of four dozen they had with them. The line carried supplies and

reinforcements to the Red army of the north.

They could see the light of the station well away to their left, as they crossed the little embankment that carried the single rusted line of rails, from which fully a half of the sleepers were amissing. It was dark, but the stars were enough to show Iwwaz Bai the way, and a half-moon sufficient to place the two charges of gun-cotton. Half an hour was enough for this and to brush over their own tracks, towing some bundles of scrub-grass behind the last camel, and to the subaltern's joy the ground rose gently beyond the railway, so that with any luck there would be no high ground between it and their bivouac for that night. So it fell out they could still see the station light, perhaps six or seven miles away to the west, as they settled down with carefully-screened cooking-fires. The subaltern had an idea that Red trains ran three times a week on that line; it was interesting to see whether to-night was the night, or whether the train passed that point in the daytime. The odds were about four to one against anything happening whilst they halted there; still, it was a sporting chance.

As luck would have it, at nearly midnight, as they were about to turn in to sleep, the sentry saw a crimson gleam where they had left their charges. Several seconds afterwards a dull thud came to them, hardly louder than the noise of a drumming hare's foot.

So far so good. The station lights seemed to increase soon after, and there was little doubt that the first charge had detonated successfully. The subaltern had placed it beneath the junction of two rails, so as to spoil both rails and the fish-plate.

He left orders with the sentry to wake him in three hours' time. The second charge was of great interest. He dreamed of tulips.

Whilst it was still dark, the sentry roused him out of his sheepskins. He looked at his watch. It was a sorry thing to lose that sleep, but the satisfaction was worth it. He roused Rokhalski and Xenia.

They gazed towards the west, turning every now and then to their watches with impatient curses, both at the slow feet of time and at the bitter blast that rent them.

After thirty-five slow minutes had passed there came a quick, bright, rosy light in the sky, glowing up over the swell of the

earth. Then came a real thud many times louder than the first. They hugged each other with joy as several more flashes and thuds followed. That second charge was designed by an artist at his calling. It had been originally the subaltern's idea to have a second charge which should explode under the line at about fifty yards from the spot at which the passing of a truck would detonate the first.

He and the artist in gun-cotton calculated that from three to four hours was a fair time for the wreckage of the leading truck to be cleared from the line. It had to be anticipated that the leading truck, with an especial eye to this matter of mines, would be empty.

That artist had devised a neat thing in exploders to be set in action by the detonation of the first charge, and which would function between three and four hours after. He had beautified it by a device which ensured that the first charge would do its work only after a train had first passed over number two.

This is not the place for technicalities, but it may be whispered that a small but simple thermo-electric couple, a pellet of sal-

ammoniac, and another activity of electro-chemistry each played their little parts.

All went as the artist had planned.

It was clear to the little watching group that the train had rumbled its slow length safely over the second charge. The first charge must have detonated, probably wrecking a truck-load of old rails, and spoiling the permanent way. They could imagine the Reds chuckling over the trumpery damage, but a little bewildered by a raiding-party so near home. Then the tiny current would act in the wire between the two charges, covered with loose earth. Punctually three and a half hours later would follow the second explosion, they hoped under a gun-truck or a locomotive. They hoped with the more assurance from the succession of explosions they had seen and heard. It would be some time before that train would move again.

In case inconvenient patrols should be prowling, they marched at once whilst it was yet dark.

Two days later, when the double grain-bags, woven of wool in red panels, were almost all empty, they sighted a low purple line on their eastern horizon.

They were destined to march a good many days yet before the purple line would shape itself into the vanguard of that inconceivably vast tangle of mountains that stretches for hundreds upon hundreds of miles to the point where the traveller emerges from the scrub-covered foothills, half an hour's drive from Rawalpindi city. During that day and the next, the faint line had hardly grown to the eye.

The day after that called for a very long march over rolling ridges, between which ran stony valley bottoms, which one could almost call dry watercourses. Though the land lay higher and the temperature fell lower, yet the snow held off, and they had advanced into that strange region of central Tataristan which is windless. Though marching was on this account vastly less arduous, they were tired when they reached the little water-hole that was to be their camp. Not physically tired, for every one had long passed the stage where the longest day's march could produce leg-weariness, yet mentally tired from the huge monotony.

They had unloaded their camels, and the two little tents were being pitched, when a man rode in from the advanced-guard. As

a precaution against surprise, the subaltern kept this out in observation until all was snug for the night.

He reported several strange horsemen a mile or so to the eastward. Here was news. Was it the enemy ? If so, it probably meant another fight. Their business was not to fight, but to deliver the Plan to the Ataman. Were they friends ? If so, well and good, but how should the subaltern find this out without disclosing the caravan to the enemy if he chanced to be an enemy ?

Luckily it was not yet dark, and the strange party were moving obliquely across the direction of their own trail.

The subaltern sent out Rokhalski, Iwwaz Bai, and half a dozen men, under the cover of a low ridge to a hollow a mile away, close by where the strangers must pass. They were to dismount, lie carefully concealed, let the strangers pass within a hundred yards or so of them, and then, if certain that they were friendly, to declare themselves. It was anxious work waiting the three-quarters of an hour that this took, but all was well. Rokhalski's party cantered in, tired as their horses were, with half a dozen Irtysh Cossacks under a Sotnik. All

were very glad to meet, but best news of all was that the Ataman himself was but a mile away. A couple of Cossacks had already been sent to fetch him.

The Sotnik explained that they were all part of a raid directed against a bridge on the railway, twenty miles north of where the subaltern's party had crossed it. A ripple of joyous laughter went round when they realised that the train which had encountered the calamity with the double demolition charge must have been the relief train sent up to repair the damage which the Cossacks had done to the bridge. It was a happy coincidence, and it promised to be a long time before traffic would run again on that section. There were no repair-shops or trains to the north towards the front. The Cossack raid had been run on a system of échélons: several of these, consisting of half a sotnia each, had been established at prearranged points along the line of the raid, so that advancing or returning parties could find fresh horses waiting for them, and where the actual raiders themselves, who would scatter after the attack, could rally and reorganise under the cover of their comrades.

The Ataman had been waiting a mile

away, at the most forward échélon, at a place called Yetti Kalandar, for the last of the attacking party to come in. His little force had avoided halting for the night at a well for reasons of security, and they shifted their bivouac after dark fell for the same reason.

Soon the awaited Ataman rode in over the ridges, followed by his half-sotnia in fours, headed by a piper and by his guidon, on the blue of which the Argent Saltire of Saint Andrew gleamed in the morning sun.

The fours wheeled close-locked into line, and the Cossacks hurraed as the subaltern rode out to meet them. The tall grizzled Ataman shook him warmly by the hand, fell on the neck of his old friend Rokhalski, and they were soon listening to the news by the camp-fire. The story of the railway caused a hearty chuckle; then the subaltern drew him aside to tell him of the Plan.

Time was now short, and the old man and the young both thought it best that the former should take the Book then and there. His detachment, who had rested two days and who had no camels, could march sixty or seventy versts a day to their headquarters in the Yulduz Tau, whilst the others

could follow more slowly with their weary camels. This would give time for the whole Plan to be assimilated, its details worked out, and the Voisko of Irtysh brought together for its execution.

The Ataman hesitated to leave the subaltern's small party behind, because if the bridge-raiders were followed up, it would bear the brunt of the pursuit, which it was ill designed to do. The Ataman's own fresh half-sotnia was now actually the rearguard of the raiders. He arranged therefore to leave the Sotnik with half the Cossacks to reinforce the subaltern, whilst he himself pushed on with all speed, accompanied by the other troop. This gave the subaltern another dozen rifles, and later on a support would be sent out to cover his progress into the hills.

No time was lost: the Ataman and his troop marched before 9 o'clock with the precious Plan in his saddle-bags. The rest, much relieved, settled down to a good night's rest, not, however, before they had taken a leaf out of the Ataman's book and shifted their camp a thousand yards from the water-hole. Well rested, they marched late next day, with both Cossacks and Pathans riding far

out in observation. The tracks of the hoofs of the Ataman's horses were plain to see wherever the ground was bare. The subaltern congratulated himself on the bundle of brushwood which their last camel pulled behind him. Their rearguard rode right and left of the bare earth of the trail, and a spare horse, with his shoes reversed, jogged along at the end of a halter behind that deceitful last camel.

V.

Fortune having favoured them so far, especially in the matter of the railway, now turned her feminine back. For a time it seemed as if all were lost. Not only had a strange streak of the most desperate ill-luck nullified the value of all their efforts, but it would have been better, so it seemed, if they had never started.

For as they came over one of the multitude of low ridges into a hollow, they found nearly a dozen dead Cossacks lying stark on the ground. Amongst these was the noble figure of the Ataman. Heedless of everything else, the subaltern sprang to where

his horse lay dead, his fine half-Irish half-Turkoman bay mare. He pulled off the saddle-bags: they were already open and empty. The Book was gone.

Too stunned and dazed for words, he searched mechanically in the wallets, in the cloak, and in the saddlery of every horse there, in the hope that it had been overlooked. There was no hope.

Everything had been ransacked, and there was little prospect that a Red commander would not overflow with suspicion at finding such a book, even if he could not read it.

Meanwhile the Risaldar and the men had searched the ground all about, and pieced together the story from the tracks. It was quite clear that the Ataman had been set upon from a totally unexpected direction, and that his little party was too small to withstand the attack. In a way, his unselfish concern for the subaltern's safety had been his destruction.

Very soon that officer decided that there was a remedy, if a desperate one. His anger made him determined to seek it, and to avenge the Ataman at any cost.

He would take Rokhalski and Iwwaz Bai and ten of the best-mounted men to pursue

the unknown Red whithersoever he might go. The rest must push on with the camels along the trail into the Yulduz Tau, now but three or four days off. At the last moment Xenia was included in the party, with many misgivings on the subaltern's part. She pointed out that no one knew the ropes as well as she herself, especially as the enemy's trail seemed to lead towards the Beshkent oasis. Moreover, for standing long marches, fatigue, hunger, and thirst, she would give place to no man.

In half an hour they marched, with a couple of good loose horses that had strayed back towards the scene of the fight.

Their preparations had been short, since they could carry nothing but their arms, saddle-bags, and cloaks. The two spare horses carried a little grain and meal.

The tracks of the enemy were easy to follow, and led them a little west of south.

If their previous trials in the Kizil Kum had been hard, they were nothing to what they now endured. They were hypnotised by the trail. They learnt each hoof-print of it by heart. They marched all day, eating occasionally a crust pulled out of a wallet as they rode, and through most of the night.

Their horses, however, were weary, and they could gain but little on the fresh animals in front of them. On the sixth evening of this nightmare chase, when every man reeled in his saddle and fought with sleep as a maniac might fight with his obsessions, they came to the edge of the great Beshkent oasis.

They spent the night huddled in the tiny walled stable-yard of a frightened Sart farmer, who was too bewildered, poor man, to know whether they were Red or White.

Still they were a full twenty versts from the city. The trail was yet good, and perhaps a day old. If the enemy were already at the Red headquarters in Beshkent, there was still hope that their leader would give the Plan to nobody but the President of the Soviet, and that they might well be delayed in finding some one to translate it for them.

The party were toilworn and ragged enough to pass muster as Reds or anything else. Xenia certainly had no beard, but she looked now like a wild boy of the steppes.

Five were as many as could ride into the city with any hope of bluffing through. These were the subaltern, Xenia, Afzal, and two Cossacks, one a veteran grizzled Prikaznik. Afzal's ignorance of Russian was no

great drawback; he could for the time pass as a Tajik. So the five rode blindly towards the city, hoping that, in the teeth of everything, something would turn up to help them in their quest. They left Rokhalski and the other six men hidden in the outbuildings of the Sart's farm as a report centre and rallying-point. It was easy enough to ride into the outskirts of the Russian town. Then they came almost into the arms of a Red patrol. It was now dusk, and at an inspired whisper from the Prikaznik they burst out into what purported to be drunken song. As he explained afterwards the Reds would take them for renegade Cossacks, deserters from the Irtysh. This was a newly-established Voisko, which accepted new candidates, and hence had a good many backsliders after the revolution. The Soviet were especially anxious to secure some of these Cossacks to their side, so they might hope to go unquestioned.

The Reds passed them by with a howl, so it seemed, partly of derision and partly of hate. Then a post of Red infantry at a road-crossing followed in the same way, and at last they were reeling and lurching along the hundred-yards-wide cobbled avenues of

the Russian town, and between its single-storey stucco-fronted houses.

They found themselves soon in a long deserted street between high, blank garden walls, lined as everywhere with poplars, and with the dwellings standing far back from the footpath.

It was now dark, and with a quick glance backwards Xenia suddenly led them through a big wooden doorway in the wall to their left.

She closed and barred it behind them on the empty street. For the moment they were hidden, and no one was likely to ask after them for a day or so. Through the rough weeds and withered fruit-bushes of the former garden she brought them by two more doorways to an inner enclosure, where they found a ramshackle shed for the horses. It was inconspicuous and not overlooked. Moreover, there was a pile of loose *saman*, or chopped straw, in a corner that would keep the nags fed for a day or two.

Then she explained that they were in a part of the grounds of the university. The students were enjoying a prolonged vacation, and no one was likely to interfere there unless suspicion was aroused. This was so much to

the good, but bigger news was that next door was the Red Ministry of War. It was likely that the clerks and under-strappers were still at work, and that several of her girl friends had been forced to work in that very department of State.

After a small mouthful of food and a drink, she would go herself straight to the War Ministry, bluff an entrance, and find out the two points vital to them—namely, the whereabouts of the Red leader who had taken the Plan from the Ataman, and what he had done with it.

VI.

Three hours later Xenia returned to them as they lay fevered with anxiety in the corners of the dirty shed. A Red commissar named Wigramin, so she learnt from the Deputy Chief of the Staff's typist, had come in that morning from the north-west with a strong patrol. He had demanded to see the War Minister himself, but both the Minister and the President were absent in their special train, and would not be back till late the next night. This gave them

twenty-four hours to think out a plan; meanwhile Wigramin was sleeping in the house that was the headquarters of the Contro-Svietka, the former residence of an Imperial Grand Duke.

"Do you mean," the subaltern asked her, "the red villa where the exiled Alexis Pavlovitch used to live? The house with the straggling white building next door, where he was supposed to keep his mistresses, saving your presence? I remember hearing about it when I was here before."

"Yes," she answered. "The white house is empty; the Red infantry that were billeted in it have been sent up to the northern front in that very relief train."

The subaltern had an idea.

"Wasn't he supposed to have had passages made between the houses?"

"You are right; James Jamesovitch, it is so."

The next step then obviously was to find their way into the white house, and try to discover one of the passages by which to penetrate into the house of the Contro-Svietka.

It took a couple of hours to discuss the details and to make some arrangements. At

length Xenia and the subaltern set out by themselves, leaving the rest in the garden supplied with a countersign. They could not go through any street in view of the certainty of being seized by a patrol of the Milizie that would fire at any one out after dark. They had therefore to cross gardens, dodging amongst bushes, and to climb walls, looking about them everywhere, and finally dash across a street to the garden of that drear white house whilst a cloud hid the moon.

They scrambled gingerly in through a broken French window. All through the night they searched desperately for some passage, and at length, when dawn was already breaking, the back of an old cupboard sounded hollow, and swung round to a push at the side. They crept cautiously forward and very slowly, amidst masses of cobwebs and the scurrying of rats. At last they felt their way hand over hand to where light showed through cracks. The subaltern peered through a chink into a big bedroom, lit by a dull, blackened, electric bulb. A gross, thick-necked, blue-chinned man sprawled in a huge four-poster bed. He seemed to be almost fully dressed. The

first light of dawn was already flooding the room, and it was too late to go forward. They decided to sleep in turns through the day in the least noisome part of that passage, whilst the other watched at the chink. They did not dare to go back into the white house, in case it should be reoccupied during the day.

First, the subaltern took his three-hour watch, and munched the crusts he had brought in his pocket, whilst his companion slept.

It filled him with horror to look into that room through the crack where the paper had dried and split, for the room had been papered in European fashion. He recalled tales of the devilries of the Contro-Svietka, and of how this very Wigramin had butchered six brother commissars in cold blood after his guard had dragged them through the streets to him, with their spines and breast-bones broken by rifle-butts. As the light grew, to his astounded gaze he saw bullet-marks on the opposite wall and the brown stains of old blood, just where his narrator had described the slaughter. This monster Wigramin slept in the very chamber, and his eyes opened in the morning to see the

blood of his victims. His sight swam as the figure on the bed slowly rose, pulled on uncleaned boots, and shouted for various people. He seemed to do most of his work in his bedroom amongst a litter of papers. The subaltern strained his eyes in hopes of seeing the book, but without result. At the same time, from the remarks of various unseen individuals, there was no doubt that this was Wigramin, and that the Plan was not far off. He remembered that Wigramin was a peculiarly noisome form of beast, who was formerly an Imperial officer of the General Staff. He had turned traitor for his own advancement.

Then it was Xenia's turn to watch: he hated to wake her, but as Wigramin continued to conduct his affairs in the room, she would be likely to overhear matters of import.

He fell to sleeping as one dead, almost the instant he laid himself down on the floor of the passage. Exhaustion was too great for any anxieties, fears, or hopes to stay the call for sleep.

It seemed to him that he had not slumbered a minute before Xenia was gently shaking his shoulder, and whispering that it was now six in the evening. What she had

overheard confirmed his own conclusions, and she added that there was good reason to think that the Plan was in that very room. They agreed that nothing could be done till after nine, so that Xenia might have another spell of desperately needed sleep. Their troubles seemed to have lessened, and there were rays of hope to be seen. As she lay down she whispered smilingly, "Yestli porokh prokhovnietsa?"—a Cossack saying like that of ours about a shot in the locker.

The subaltern had hardly watched for half an hour before the commissar went out. As he left he glanced round at a heavy box on the floor of the room of which the clamped lid could just be seen. This gave the watcher cause to think. It seemed a good time to cut carefully through the paper round the door so that it would open easily when the time came. This took nearly two hours of infinite care, niggling inch by inch. The bolt on their side was already freed, and it was with huge relief that he found he could push the door open an inch or two, with only a rug hung on the wall inside it to hinder it further. This rug luckily seemed to hide most of the joints in the paper.

Somewhat after nine he roused Xenia, and

they watched together, munching some more fragments of flap-jacks from their pockets. The commissar did not return till after ten. His pasty face seemed flushed as with liquor, and he hurled himself to his bed, boots and all, with a pistol still at his belt. The vital hour had arrived on which all their fates depended. What with the curfew and night patrols, the coast would be clear at eleven. They had thought out their plan, and gazed breathlessly at the minute-hand that crept upward with such infinite slowness. At the hour they shook hands, and the subaltern slowly pushed the door open a fraction of an inch at a time. When he had not yet made good a foot the hinge had creaked and the rug inside fell off its nails to the floor. The sleeping figure merely fidgeted in its coma. At last he could slip through. The light still glowed, but red and dim. He crept to the other door, and very carefully bolted it on the inside, and noted the heavy chest on the floor. He returned to Xenia, who took an oblong packet from inside her rubashka. All was still. The door was now but two inches open. He struck a match, shielding it from the room, and applied it to the end of the packet. Soon the soft

mass spluttered and gave out sparks and coils of greasy smoke.

Xenia opened the door again, and he threw it under the victim's bedstead. They waited, keyed up, whilst the fumes filled the fusty room, obscuring the feeble lamp. Then the commissar lurched to his feet, cursing, rubbing his eyes, and stumbling from side to side.

With an oath he croaked "Fire, Fire!" but his choked voice did not carry. Fumbling in a pocket he staggered, half-falling, to the chest. The subaltern took a deep breath and sprang at him, pulling out a black object, like a short soft snake.

The perjured man turned and opened his yellow-toothed mouth for a shout. He was too late. The sandbag curled round his head with a thud, and he sank without a groan. His assailant seized the chain of keys that was half out from a pocket and, Xenia behind him, almost ran to the chest. It opened at once. In it, to their joy, above a mass of papers, lay the Plan. They replaced the rug, and before switching off the light, the subaltern ran his fingers through the hair of the prone figure. "It will be a long time before he murders any one again," he whispered,

with a glance at the horrid splashes on the wall behind him.

They shut the door behind them, concealing the cracks in the paper as best they might. Then through the ghostly, rambling, white house. They dodged a frowzy patrol of the Milizie, and were back half an hour later in the dirty cowshed with their comrades. But danger still threatened in many forms. Early in the night the Prikaznik, as he scouted around corners of their waste garden, had overheard a Red patrol, in the street outside, talking of the suspected presence in the city of a party of Whites, and the measures taken to smell them out. He gathered that the principal step was the tightening of the cordon around the suburbs, with extra examining posts and patrols.

By good chance the party they had left at the Sart's farm was well outside this cordon. This all needed thought and a discussion of ways and means to circumvent their enemies' plannings. The subaltern decided that Afzal and the Cossacks should set out at once to break their way through the cordon, and rejoin the party at the Sart's farm. The drunken Cossack ruse would not answer again.

They must ride cautiously out, fall upon a small Red patrol at some lonely spot, seize their caps and Red star badges, and take if possible sufficient papers to get them past the posts. In the rambling straggling outskirts of the north side there were many plantations filled with thick undergrowth which would help this plan. It was the best that could be thought out for the moment. If the attack failed, they must scatter, and each man arrive alone as best he might at the Sart's farm. The Plan could not be given to Rokhalski's party: there was too much risk of loss in the rough and tumble that lay before them. Xenia had an idea for this.

Rokhalski's party had to start at once. The darkness of the very small hours would help them; sentries would be at their sleepiest, and patrols numbed with the cold. If they were for any reason driven from the farm, they were to leave a message in an appointed place.

Soon Xenia and the subaltern were alone once more with their precious Plan.

There was no time to be lost. Rokhalski had been told the main outline of its contents, but the mass of figures, times, and dates

were too much for any man's memory to carry.

Every day that elapsed before the Plan could be handed to the Ataman's successor was a misfortune. Xenia once more led her comrade through the rank growths of many neglected gardens to what proved to be the University main building. Here they climbed to an attic so high that few Red visitations reached there. Moreover, its own door that gave on to an upper corridor was plastered over, and one entered, after certain knocks on a certain spot, by gymnastic feats from another room. This was done from window-sill to window-sill after dark, by the aid of a wire, pulled up into place in answer to those knocks. Xenia explained all this in whispers as they crept up the stairs. It was a very safe retreat, since no one would suspect the extra window from below; in any case it looked down on to a little-used courtyard. The attic was the meeting-place of a secret society called the "Falcon." Its members were nearly all Poles, Slovaks, and Czechs, and it could be relied upon to help Allied subjects in trouble.

Here, after the necessary display of secrecy and agility, they found the "General Secre-

tary," a capable woman, daughter of a Polish father, who spoke English without a trace of accent. She had worked as a teacher for several years in Edinburgh.

Not only did she afford the fugitives a haven in her attic, but commenced at once to organise a means for them to get out of Beshkent with their all-important Plan. The subaltern she arranged for very soon. He was to acquire the uniform, documents, and the identity of an Italian officer prisoner of war—an Italian, be it understood, born in Austria, and late of the old Austrian army. This would permit him to walk about with comparative safety amongst thousands of Magyar, Austrian, and German war prisoners who thronged the streets, and would even save him from having to answer questions.

Ostensibly he could speak Italian, English with a Chicago flavour, and only a smattering of Russian or German. He might, thus equipped, employ the "idiot-boy" method when questioned by Red patrols and so make his way with luck to the Sart's farm.

Xenia's case was more difficult, for Bielschapska, their guardian angel, had decided that she should carry the Plan.

They talked over the matter, weighing the pros and cons of many plans, for a number of hours, and discovered by discussion and thought insuperable objections to all these successive proposals.

Well on towards the day they were visited by another "Falcon," also a Polish girl, who was to provide the Austrian uniform, documents, and other details. These would include a bow of the Italian national colours to be worn above the "F. J. I." (Franz Josef Imperator) on the field-grey shako. This sporting of national colours had become the usual thing amongst the heterogeneous mass of nationalities that made up the old Austrian army, even as the inchoate medley of the so-called Indian army. It would help the subaltern to be able to point to this bow, except that there was a danger that some too effusive Italian ally might burst inopportunely into welcome. The possibility needed forethought; the subaltern could only suggest an extemporised gumboil and bandage.

The uniform and papers had to be fetched from the dwelling of a brother "Falcon," to whom they had been bequeathed, and who kept them as a sheet-anchor. Xenia's plans

had necessarily to be amorphous. The subaltern insisted on seeing her safely out of Beshkent before he would make his own bow to the Reds.

For the moment she was to be equipped with two or three alternative disguises provided by sister "Falcons." They hoped most from the white burqa [1] and stiff rectangular black chashband [2] of horsehair of a Sartianka,[3] below which would peep tiny knee-boots of soft crinkled Persian leather embroidered in the green-and-red tracery and love-knots of old Kashmir. The ample folds of the ankle-long burqa gave room for papers and the like.

At last a plan of sorts, which still gave plenty of chinks for disaster to creep in by, shaped itself out.

Iwwaz Bai was an important adjunct; he knew Beshkent well, so arrangements were made to fetch him in.

Xenia, garbed as a lass once more, was to go to the railway station that evening, plant herself inconspicuously in a carriage whilst the north-bound train was being marshalled

[1] White cotton cloak, covering head and face, down to the heels.

[2] Musalman woman's veil. [3] Sart lady.

on a siding, and trust to dodging any one who seemed to want to inspect passes or tickets. It should be remembered that any one who wished to travel by train had to have a pass from the Soviet, as no one was supposed to use the railway except on Soviet business. This pass they could not obtain. The approaching of the right bureaucrat in the right way was too long a business for them in the day.

Iwwaz Bai would accompany her disguised as a native servant. Once the train was well out on the steppe, towards the station of Semitubinsk or thereabouts, they might jump off it in the dark. It slowed down to a footpace every now and then for many reasons.

Once clear of the train, Iwwaz Bai would secure a couple of ponies from some chance encampment of wandering Kirghiz, and they would ride back to the Sart's farm together. There were two great dangers in this. Firstly, Xenia might be caught before the train started from Beshkent Station; secondly, they might find no Kirghiz on the steppe, and wander about hopelessly till they dropped from thirst and exhaustion.

Obstacles, however, were made to be over-

come. They rested, slept, and ate during the day, and Iwwaz Bai prepared a ragged-looking bundle wherein was some Musalman bread and a gourd of water. Xenia sorted her papers: she was supposed to be a school teacher, transferred to the elementary school at Semitubinsk.

The train would leave at half-past eight.

Before seven, then, they clambered out of the attic window for the last time after a sorrowful leave-taking.

The subaltern made his own way towards the station, determined to see Xenia safely off before making for the Sart's farm himself.

Everything and every one seemed suspicious, and he walked along the streets with his heart in his mouth. He was glad to lie down in the tangle of a shrubbery alongside the station buildings, from whence he could watch the siding. Xenia, he could see, was already in her carriage, and Iwwaz Bai was there attending on her in a most counter-revolutionary way.

Then in the feeble light there slouched up a slant-shouldered, round-backed figure in tight breeches and high-heeled knee-boots, a peaked cap askew on his head. He stopped

as he caught sight of Xenia, who, as ill-luck would have it, happened to glance out of the window of the tall flat-sided carriage.

The subaltern cursed and seethed with impotent rage as he realised that the new-comer had recognised her. He waited for an arrest. Rather to his surprise this did not come. The man instead talked oilily to her, smirking and preening himself. Gradually the subaltern realised that this was one of the jelly-fish breed of *çi-devant* officer who drifted with the tide, putting up with whatever the Reds might choose. He had known Xenia in former days, and was now trying to renew a most unwelcome acquaintance. Xenia bore the trial well, but nothing she could do could rid her of the man, who seemed to imagine a conquest.

Soon a blowsy Red guard lurched up with rifle and fixed bayonet. He tackled both the ex-officer and Xenia, demanded who they were, and their papers. A locomotive pushed the carriage and the little group almost out of the subaltern's sight. An altercation seemed to arise; the Red hauled the knock-kneed one towards the guardroom, and then clamoured for Xenia, whom he addressed as "my pigeon," to come along as well. Iwwaz

Bai followed humbly, carrying a trunk and a bundle.

The four disappeared into the guard-room of the station; the subaltern followed cautiously, and peered through the dirty cracked window. The room had in pre-revolutionary times been the station buffet. It was now bare except for a battered counter and a score of unclean Red soldiers of sorts, lounging and spitting about it. Their rifles—ancient and untended Vetterlis and Berdans—stood in a rack.

A little circle gathered round the four. They were confronted by some one who was evidently a Red official. The subaltern slunk in through the door, and jammed himself into the crowd of onlookers, fingering a hip-pocket tenderly.

The ex-officer was disposed of at once, and hustled out with a kick into the paved station-yard and the outer dark. The commissar glowered at Xenia and Iwwaz Bai, and started, after a few blood-curdling remarks, to search the small trunk which she had.

"Now comes the time," thought the subaltern. "This is the big crisis: the Plan is probably in that box."

All that heart-in-the-mouth feeling had gone from him; he felt quite calm, as if nothing now mattered very much. He patted his hip-pocket again, which gave him a snug feeling, and glanced at the position of the rifle-rack. Fortunately, it was in a corner, and the subaltern determined that he should be between it and his opponents when the lead began to fly.

Meanwhile the pompous sour-faced official, who seemed to be a commissar of the Contro-Svietka itself, was rummaging through the trunk. Through all this Xenia Dimitrievna stood and faced her death without a quiver and without a change of colour. Garment after frilly garment came out, the soldiers gibed lewdly, and it was half empty when a big unshaven man elbowed his way in. He was incongruously dressed in European clothes of grubby grey flannel. He looked, paused, and spoke to the commissar. As far as the subaltern could follow his quick speech, he was that bureaucrat's chief assistant.

There were some important papers waiting in the bureau to be signed. The pompous man looked still more pompous and bureaucratically important behind his round spectacles. The big man offered to complete the

search so that his superior might go to sign those papers.

This caused a little diversion. The superior at last stalked off, and the search continued. It seemed less thorough in the hands of the big man, but the elbowing Red soldiers missed little. One emptied the trunk, jabbing a knife in to find a possible double bottom; another snatched Iwwaz Bai's little bundle. He held up the quilted cotton abbah [1] that wrapped it, and ran his fingers down the seams, throwing it down with a curse at finding nothing.

The big man commanded the replacement of everything in the trunk, and went on to a little homily on the wickedness of trying to trick the officials of the Revolution. Luck seemed to be turning again, but where, thought the subaltern, was the Plan?

He could hardly believe his eyes and ears when he saw the pair likewise hustled into the empty courtyard. He slipped out like an eel in a bucket of oil, and met them in the black shadow under a tree. The train was still in the station. He whispered a few sentences to them and darted off running,

[1] Gown.

regardless of every one, along the side of the line.

He stumbled through the sheds of the goods-yard and amongst countless points and switches. Well clear of everything, he came to a signal-lamp that showed green in a round white metal disc that turned atop of a five-foot steel pillar. He kicked and tore at a rusty iron pin: he could hear the train starting. At last the pin fell out. As the engine rumbled slowly towards him he turned the red light towards it, and vanished into a culvert-pipe.

With groans and screechings of brakes and shouts, the train came to a standstill. People jumped out and a little crowd formed, whilst the engineman and brakesman and a gang of conductors walked jabbering to the signal. He saw Xenia and Iwwaz Bai mingle with that little crowd. After ten minutes' vociferation and cursing of signalmen the engine staff replaced the pin, judging that it had fallen out by accident. The subaltern saw the train start with his two comrades on board. A sudden impulse seized him, and he sprang at an open doorway.

No one seemed to see him, and soon he found the two looking happy amongst a

huddle of sheep-skinned Kirghiz and long-cloaked Sart farmers. His Austrian uniform forbade him the train, but no official could see him for the moment; the carriage was almost dark, but for a woollen wick spluttering in a tin tray of sheep's fat. Xenia quickly indicated that the Plan was safe: Iwwaz Bai had sewn it into the lining of the cotton cloak that covered his bundle; the Red soldier's fingers must have passed within an inch of it. The subaltern marvelled at Xenia's courage, as she had looked on at this without a blench or a flutter of the eyelid.

He dared not stay for long: his uniform would betray them all if a conductor should walk down the carriage; hidden amongst the loyal Muhammedans they were safe until the time came for the jump. He left them, and as the train passed a soft-looking level patch of undergrowth where trees gave a black shadow, jumped for it, thinking as he did it of the London buses tearing down past No. 96 Piccadilly. That train was not going so fast as those buses, and he landed soft. Hidden amongst the trees he watched the train rumble into the darkness; no one had noticed him, or if they had noticed had not worried about an odd Austrian more or less.

He had lost his bearings pretty completely. After a search he came to a verst-post of the railway. It showed a huge figure giving the distance from Moscow. He racked his brains trying to remember the verstage to Beshkent, and after a severe mental struggle decided that he was about five-and-twenty versts outside. He hoped that this meant he was through the cordon, and that he would merely have to go across country eastward for a few miles to find the Sart's farm.

It was farther than he expected, and the way was hard to find. For hours he blundered through irrigation ditches and patches of snow in unfamiliar surroundings. Once he lay in the big furrows of a vineyard to escape a patrol. At last, in the open country, he struck the path they had first used to reach the farm. He noticed tracks leading north along it.

Another mile of groping found him at its mud walls. Slowly he pushed open the rough unpainted doorway to find it deserted.

Further search showed fresh bullet-marks on the walls, and blood-stains. He searched for a certain rafter in a cow-byre. Pulling it out towards him, from its recess in the mud wall, he found a piece of homespun

cotton cloth like a handkerchief. Two sides of it were hemmed, and the stitches of this hemming were remarkable. He turned it over, conning it inch by inch: the succession of long and short stitches spelt out a message in the dashes and dots of the Morse code. It was brief. It contained the word "fight," and the code name they had invented for one of their trysting-places forty miles away in the foothills.

He rummaged about still further, and found some mealie cobs. They were dry and hard, and seemed to have been overlooked for some time. With these and some water from a shallow well he staved off hunger. Filling his pockets with the last half-dozen, he set out on foot to the northward.

The steppe was not difficult walking, so he kept a couple of hundred yards from the trail and parallel to it. This meant a good deal of extra labour, since every now and then he had to hark back to make sure that he had not lost the direction. He tramped hard till the dawn rose over the mountains, to which he toiled.

He rested a little, and marched on through the morning. It was well after noon when he spied three tiny dots on the vast sweep

of the horizon before him. In an hour they had become two horsemen leading a spare horse, coming towards him. He lay hid in some clumps of high grass. Soon he recognised Afzal and the Cossack Prikaznik. They welcomed him with joy, and explained that they had had to fight a Red party which surrounded the Sart's farm, and to retire to the spot fixed beforehand, a group of springs named Kizil Bulak. All was well; one of the Cossacks was slightly wounded, and they had ridden back with a spare horse to find him. That evening they reached Kizil Bulak, heartily glad to rest from all their troubles before a cheery but carefully-shielded fire. Their only anxiety now was about Xenia and Iwwaz Bai and the Plan, but the subaltern felt that the old man would pull through somehow. Next day he sent out three small patrols in likely directions to help them in. It was not till the morning after that they appeared, not only safe, but with the Plan intact, and escorted by half a dozen friendly smiling Kirghiz, who bowed low before Iwwaz Bai. How at last they reached the energetic young Cossack colonel who had succeeded the grizzled Ataman, how he welcomed the timely Plan, how they joined in the raids

and attacks of the Irtysh Cossacks, and how at last they achieved an immense desert journey through the ancient cities of Samarkhara and Sogdiana to a remote British consulate in Persia, is another story.

THE COUNTER-RAIDERS

THE COUNTER-RAIDERS.

I.

THE big car pulled up with a grinding of gravel under the grey walls of cut lichened stone, whose lancet-window heads showed black and deep sunk in the strong moon's shadow.

I was distinctly surprised at what I saw as I stepped out, followed by old Colonel Quintin, from whose lips I had gathered wisdom during the journey.

As we swept through the grey winter afternoon over great rolling waves of hard rock-bound country, from which dark mountain humps loomed purple against the western sky, I realised that I was going to see something a little startling to an old Regular soldier. Nor was I disappointed.

To commence with, it was a little unusual to see a whole battalion of infantry forming up right among aeroplanes in line making ready for a night flight.

Colonel Quintin led me through a little belt of elms on to the rather scrubby turf of the flying-ground.

Three lines of big biplanes stood, suffused in a soft but brilliant light, which spread out low, like a flood over the ground, without glare or dazzle, a few hundred yards to their front.

Already coughs and barks from some of the great engines in the foremost rank showed that the work of "warming up" was in hand.

At the same time platoons of infantry swung with a brisk yet long stride to a halt, one platoon before each towering aircraft.

This was certainly infantry, but yet there seemed something odd and unusual. As I looked and reflected, it struck me that their legs were somehow different. They were not the stumpy supports cylindrically clothed in puttees, and suggesting elephantiasis of the trouser leg, that Thomas Atkins affects. Nor yet were they pipe-stems with ungainly knee-knobs that I had seen on sepoys at Rambelbelipur. I decided at last that they were remarkably like normal human legs of a distinctly sinewy and athletic mould.

"Would you care to have à look at the

men ? " said Colonel Quintin, breaking in on my cogitations.

He took me up to the right platoon of the foremost body. They were standing easy, smiling and joking in subdued tones, and one tall young man with a single star on his shoulder was chatting in front with a couple of British officers. " This lot are Tanaolis," said Quintin to me, as I looked at the level row of ruddy-brown faces. Here was something quite different, I thought, from my mental picture of the sepoy. These were all tall upstanding lads with clean-run limbs and flat backs, who looked at one out of level unwavering eyes. Straight noses with clear-cut nostrils caught the eye above thin firm lips.

I had seen those alert faces before somewhere, and their almost too regular moulding. Suddenly I remembered. The museum at Taxila, and its long rows and repetitions of Bactrian Greek marbles.

Here, too, was the unmistakable rounding of the Greek chin, and the angle of its forehead, as it were Phœbus Apollo.

" Yes," said Quintin, as if he had guessed my thoughts, " it was not until Aurel Stein had published ' Serindia ' that we Punjab

officers began to wake up to the fact that most of our men were the direct descendants of the Hellenes of Bactria. What with tribal endogamy and Mendelism, the breed has remained practically unmixed. Also, in these valleys with their cold winters, environment has made little change in the type. Nearly all the children have brown hair, and the majority green or even blue eyes."

He was interrupted by the approach of the captain of the company and a major: Quintin introduced us.

"This is Colonel Rivers, who has come out from the War Office at home to see our little experiment." He added, smiling, "Of course, the Whitehall General Staff are very sick with us Dominion blokes in the Punjab striking out a new line." The major, Dudley by name, was a tall black-haired man with a great breadth of shoulder and length of limb, and far from carrying the stage field-officer's corporation. He turned with an engaging smile, remarking, "We are frightful old reactionaries after all. Why, if any of your wild and woolly Labour members were to come along he would call us feudal. Thank God, they can't get in now. As for the regiments, they've gone right back to 1885."

I could not follow what he was talking about, and must have looked puzzled.

"Oh, I should have explained," went on Quintin. "When we broke off from India, one of the first laws passed was an Aliens Act. No one can come into the country unless he is specially invited by one of the provincial Jirgas. Even a military officer or an official comes in on probation, and this is not extended unless he shows himself really keen on the country. We find the Sahibs on the Jirgas are stricter about this than the Khans and the Sardars."

This was a little beyond me, so Quintin, seeing it, said, "Never mind, I will try and explain when we have more time. You might like to look at the equipment and all that. It is rather special."

The captain, who incidentally was dressed just like his men, was a pink-faced slight youth with a hard look about his mouth. "These safas are a new thing," he said, pointing to a man's turban. "In the old days in winter the man had a cotton safa, and we gave him a Balaclava cap and a scarf to lug about. Now we just give him a woollen safa in winter. Pashmina, the stuff's called, fine wool of the ibex. Great brain wave."

The man before whom he halted wore a long smock of khaki, loose, and coming down nearly to the knee. I could not quite make out whether the material was serge or flannel. He lifted up one of the square corners of its lower edge, and showed another beneath it. "Brain wave too," said he jerkily. "Before, a fellow used to get a rotten tight serge jacket, two or three grey-back shirts, and some vests and a cardigan, and all sorts of tripe to be carted round. Now he has three smocks, all just the same, four if it's very cold, washes them in turn, and wears the whole outfit if it's cold enough. Too easy."

The man's rifle was a very long single loader. This really took my breath away. "Aren't you a little conservative?" I could not help ejaculating to Dudley.

He smiled again. "No jolly fear, colonel; we've given up browning the countryside like the unskilled labourists of 1917 and 1918 used to do in France, and hoping that some one would walk into it. When one of our lads shoots, it's a funeral. Look, they only carry forty rounds," he said, pointing to four little pockets of khaki drill looped on to a cartridge waist-belt of webbing. "The muzzle velocity is nearly four thousand," he added.

This really seemed to me to be making a fetish of guerilla methods. Even the man's short bayonet was a distinctly more slender affair than usual, rather like the old French weapon.

For equipment he wore a harness of drab webbing, with two braces, like the officers' pattern. On his back he carried a large haversack with a water-bottle of aluminium clipped outside. Above this was strapped, hair outwards, what seemed to me to be a hearth-rug. Dudley came to the rescue. "Poshtin," he said; "sheepskin coat, you know. Worth about three blankets and a greatcoat for warmth, and weighs five pounds. It's a specially woolly sort of sheep, and tanned with mulberry juice with the hair still on."

My brain reeled as I tried to imagine a trooping of the colour with men wearing that sort of Teddy-bear outfit. However, I suppose your Guardsman wears a hairy hat, so why not a hairy coat on the frontier?

The soldier had no entrenching tool at all, though the bulge in his haversack showed where he carried his mess-tin and rations.

His nether garments were "plus fours" of a wide and voluminous variety. The material interested me; it was cotton certainly, but

vastly different from khaki drill. The weave was the old Keltic, square, not diagonal, and the material was quite loosely woven and canvassy. I must admit that this was just the fabric and just the cut to give the man real freedom of movement.

I said so to Dudley. He replied, "Yes; and, of course, it is only the ordinary garment of the Pathan and the P.M. slightly modified. The Pathan lives in a country where you have vast extremes of hot and cold, more than anywhere in the world. He also needs the free use of his limbs to pursue his nefarious avocations. So, being a practical scientist, he modified the old Scythian trouser in a scientific way, cool to wear when it's 125° in the shade, and warm at 20° below. Also, they never go baggy at the knees. The old clothing department we used to be at the mercy of could never see that. They thought trousers were merely needed for polishing office chairs with. However, we changed all that at the G.C.U."

"What's that?" I asked innocently.

"The 'Great Clean Up,'" he replied with a chuckle. "I'll tell you about that after."

Everything about this strange private soldier was unusual. I looked at his legs.

A pair of woollen hose-tops met his wide knickerbockers just below the knee-cap, and the flash of a "Highland garter," its colour a touch of "*panache*," showed how they were secured. The ankles were bound round with two or three turns of a short puttee, and on his bare muscular feet were quaint silver-laced sandals. They made me think of the *cothurnæ* of the Greeks, or the *caligæ* that a Roman emperor was dubbed from.

"Those," said Dudley, "are the only wear for rough ground and getting about quickly. Half the weight of boots to start with, and, as your racing swine used to say, a pound off a horse's feet is four pounds off his back. They let a man use the ankles God gave him too. Nothing new, of course. Piffers used to wear them for donkey's years, ever since 1846, until the clothing department spike-bozzled them. Very scientific, anyhow, like the breeks."

I had already gathered that these platoons were each to be embarked in an aeroplane, and so transported to the scene of their usefulness. This was nothing new; it had been started as far back as 1922. To-night there was to be a new development, and I was very foggy as to the form it would take. I

hesitated to ask Dudley, or his captain, as the twinkle in their eyes told me that nothing would please them better than to pull the leg of a senior General Staff officer from Whitehall.

At the feet of each man in the platoon lay a long tapering green bundle, festooned with mysterious cords and slings of webbing.

There seemed no apparent reason for this, but when I asked, both Dudley and Quintin seemed to want to talk about something else.

I was much impressed with the appearance of the platoon, of which the smallest man seemed to me to stand a good five feet nine. They radiated vigour and alertness, very different to the grey-faced, hungry, cotton-clad sepoys I remembered seeing in the La Bassée trenches in December '14. Also, they moved very smartly, and were quite other in build and feature from the bulgy-lipped, broad-nosed, and spindle-shanked creatures that I used to see when I first soldiered in Hindustan way back eighteen years ago. All the same, their equipment and their armament seemed ridiculously inadequate for any serious fighting. I could have carried it under my arm, and as the chill wind soughed up from the snow-topped hills before me, I

shuddered at the idea of a night in the open wrapped in a single sheepskin coat.

I had to dive into my case for a fat Corona Corona before I felt cosy again.

As I stood, the tall platoon commander, on whose chest I noted the ribbon of 1915, with a silver rosette, jerked out an order in English, and the platoon, wheeling to their left rear, picked up each man his tapering bundle, and filed, with rifles slung, into the bulging fuselage of their aeroplane.

Its three great propellers were already revolving slowly, with an occasional cough, splutter, or pistol-like report in the silencer.

A mechanic or two stood at each wing-tip. The engines' grumbling swelled into a roar, and at a word from the squadron commander a sergeant saluted, and the great machine sped off.

Its roar and blast died down as it outlined itself climbing against the white snow of the range that leapt sheer up across the flat-floored valley, whose cornfields and clustered park-like trees showed plainly in the moonlight. A moment later the second machine was off, the third, and the fourth.

"There goes A Company," said Dudley. "Whilst they are getting their height and

formation you have just a few minutes to look at B. You and I are going in the last machine of B Company."

As I walked with him to where stood the second row of machines, I noticed another body of infantry in fours approaching the edge of the aerodrome. "These," said Dudley, "are the savage battalion of the Rohtas Regiment. When this lot of machines comes back they will take them along as a second trip.

"These three platoons, just going to embark, are Dogras—Rajputs, of the really genuine kind, you know, from the Punjab hills." I did not know, but looked.

These men were smaller than the Tanaoli platoon I had first seen, and with less harsh features and differently-shaped headgear, but good-looking withal. I noticed what I had not seen at first: just below the shoulder seam of each man's wide-sleeved pleated smock a little silver badge. Peering at it closely, it seemed like a Greek seal gem, a helmeted head, facing to the front. Dudley explained that this was a head of Alexander, who was the national hero of all the fighting tribes of the Punjab and Frontier. The badge had been adopted as the emblem of Punjabi and Frontier regiments when the Punjab

shook off from India to be a sort of Ulster. It matched the Canadians' maple-leaf and the rising sun of Australia.

I felt that I must ask more questions. I had realised from something in the newspapers a year or two before that the Punjab had done something or other with respect to India, but I was rather hazy as to its precise significance.

However, the fifth machine's engines roared as the pilot opened her out and throttled down again, so I hurried with Dudley towards the end of the line. The seventh platoon were, I heard, Sikhs, who were taller than the Dogras, with brown and black beards curled up round their chins. I had just time for a glance at the third company with Dudley. These, he told me, were all Pathans. Two platoons he called Khattaks, lean and sinewy, with laughing eyes and black bobbed locks curled up at the ends with oil. Their strong features were even more Greek than the Tanaolis. I gathered that these boasted to have sustained the greatest percentage of killed in the old German war.

The other platoons were Yusafzais, fair-skinned, tow-haired, tall, and burlier than the rest, and startlingly Western European in feature.

Our machine was ready, and we hurried to the rope-ladder of the gangway. To me, asking, Dudley explained that flying-coats and goggles were unnecessary for passengers, since the aircraft were electrically warmed and completely covered in.

We wriggled between the rows of sitting infantrymen to seats beside the pilot in the protuberant rounded nose. The structure was quivering already as the throttles opened to the twelve hundred horse-power. The monstrous machine trundled and bounded along the rough turf like a mere two-seater. As we settled into steady zooming flight I saw the broad flat valley beneath, with its unfenced cornfields gleaming in the silver moonlight, intersected here by the white wavering lines of boulder-strewn stream beds, and here by low dry-stone walls. At the far edge it rose into spurs clad in black pines.

The pilot swept into a steeply-banked turn. Dudley remarked that no time could be wasted in getting off, as each machine had to be in its exact position before the formation proceeded. Any delay or error spelt confusion in the dark at the other end.

As we turned I looked at the pilot, and

saw, rather to my surprise, that he too was a bearded Sikh.

"This is Mr Malik Singh Jamarwal," said Dudley, catching my glance, and the pilot's white teeth flashed in a smile.

"I belong to the Punjab branch of the Air Force Reserve," said he in Oxonian English. "I used to be in the old R.F.C. during the war."

"He was a hockey Blue afterwards," whispered Dudley, who seemed to think rather more of this.

The machine turned once more, and again we faced, always climbing, towards the black ridge of fir-clad mountain to the north-east, with its white crest.

As we rose, I could see more ranges and more valleys beyond; and peering down through transparent panels, I espied two other machines of our flight below us.

Above, the brilliant moon showed us every detail, even the rigging and the tricolour cockades painted on the wing's upper surface. Hardly less brilliant than the round disc of Artemis was the uncanny glow of the stars from a background of infinite blackness. Away to the northward gleamed great snow mountains, and to one side of and below

their summits what seemed a huge level white plain suspended in mid-air, like a Laputa made by Mr Buszard.

It took a little thought to realise that this was cloud, and not some solid phenomenon of the unexplored upper valleys of the great river we were approaching.

Things move very slowly in the air, and I had plenty of leisure to look about.

The machine was uncommonly silent. Speech was easy, and the pilot explained that recent advances in the design of air-screws had made a considerable difference in this respect. The details of the passenger accommodation had been improved since my last journey in an aeroplane. Formerly a passenger machine was usually ill-ventilated, stuffy, and headachy. This was now remedied, he said, but I could not quite understand how. Another point he drew my attention to was that the structure of the aeroplane was entirely of steel. I quite agreed with him that this was really vital in a country with extremes of heat and cold, grilling sun, and driving snow. The little door in the bulk-head opening on the alley-way to what Dudley called the "Troop deck" was at my elbow and ajar. I looked through to see eight rows

of basket-chairs, three abreast, with a narrow gangway running towards the tail of the machine. Each seat was thoroughly well filled by a burly and rather bored-looking Yusafzai, and even what I had considered the exiguous marching order of the men gave the scene an aspect of repletion, not to say congestion.

I remarked another fresh point. The half-dozen men in the first two rows were armed with a very different weapon to the remainder, and their cartridge pouches also differed.

The arm was short and stumpy, resembling an old-fashioned elephant-gun in the capacious gape of its muzzle. The electric light was distinctly dim, and now the pilot switched it out altogether, so I had to ask Dudley for more explanations.

"Well, you see," said he, "that's what we call a hand howitzer. For years we had been meeting people who spent most of their time behind sandbags, or boulders, or something bullet-proof anyhow. We spent many years and countless tons of lead shooting at them with flat-trajectory rifles and machine-guns. In 1915, of course, the rifle grenade came in as a feeble sort of extempore stop-gap,

but it was not until after the G.C.U. that we got a sensible tailor-made shoot-over-the-rim weapon that you see there. It's a neat little article, makes quite good shooting up to 500 yards, and can just touch 700. It's rifled, of course, and has a very simple instantaneous fuse, rather like the old 106 of the gunners.

"The little shell weighs just eighteen ounces, and is filled with a new stuff called crumpite. You can get off about eight rounds a minute if you want to, and you can fire it from the shoulder. It makes a bit of a jar, but there are a couple of recoil springs that take most of the bump. With that weapon it is no use a fellow getting behind a boulder 500 yards away and plugging you as you pant up the hill towards him.

"You have a few pals with these hand howitzers adjacent, and they soon hoick him out from behind that old rock."

"Don't you have any Lewis guns then, or anything to correspond?"

"No fear," he answered; "we chucked those several years ago, except for the regular battalions, of course. I am speaking of the Savage battalion of each regiment."

"What about machine-guns and mortars?" I asked.

"Yes; we have a couple of each in the battalion, but it is a job getting them about on the hillside at the pace we have to move. You have to select your men very carefully, and give them nothing else to carry. It is doubtful if they are worth the weight, but you often get up against a tower, or a strong-point or fortified building of sorts, and then the mortars come in handy."

"And the machine-guns?"

"Well, we don't always take them out, but they get their chance when the enemy follow up a withdrawal in any force. If they are careless, your machine-gunner sometimes gets a target that is worth firing at, but pretty seldom.

"In this sort of business you find that if you give even a selected man more than about forty pounds to carry you slow him down a lot, and slow movement gives your tribesman just the opening he wants. It is a very different business from the bludgeon work of France in the old days, and there's much more technique in it."

I began to see Dudley's point, and asked him how range-finding was done, and how they managed for Very lights.

"Oh, we have that too," said he. "The

hand howitzer makes a perfect range-finder, and we have a sort of young star-shell that you can fire out of it, which is better than even the old 1½-inch light.

"There is one little stunt that might interest you. Of course we can have no mules or anything in these shows, but often, when we surprise a village, we catch an odd straggler or two, handcuff him, and commandeer him to carry a machine-gun or a tripod or some little trifle like that. Of course you have to watch him very carefully, and prod him gently with a bayonet to make him see reason."

I was still bewildered by several things, especially Dudley's reference to "savage" battalions. It seemed clear that the unit now being transported in our dozen aeroplanes came under that designation.

My attention was diverted by the wild majesty of the scene that now appeared below us.

We had crossed the first range of hills that had faced us as we stood on the aerodrome. Now to our right was a deep rugged gorge through which flowed the great foam-speckled river. Below us it spread out from the iron embrace into wide channels banked

with light-grey sand. Ahead, and slightly to the left, there seemed to crouch another great mountain range, parallel to our course, sombre with pines, crested with snow, and streaked with the lighter tones of cliff faces. North of it more thinly-clad spurs ran down into a wide valley far away, in which I could dimly discern an occasional prism-shadowed cluster of cubes that were houses.

The far wall of the valley melted away into the dark distance, overshadowed and blackened by low-flying cloud-banks, through which gleamed an occasional snow pinnacle.

Dudley shouted at me as our machine pitched in the air-waves over the river that the great mountain was Aornos, and that our course was shaped well to the south of our objective, in order to avoid alarming the larger villages of the valley. The smaller hamlets of the mountain slopes could neither turn out so many armed men, nor could they move so quickly to concentrate against us. It was for a similar reason that we had approached our objective from the less obvious south-east.

For a minute or two I gazed full of awe and wonder at the scene, whilst behind me a mechanic in blue dungarees passed from one

engine across the alley-way to another. As he listened to the clatter of valves, the hissing inrush of air, or watched jumping gauge-needles, he had no eyes for the great spaces below us.

The pilot was intent on his map, whereon I noticed a sprawling cross in red ink towards the head of the open valley not far ahead of us. His altimeter needle crawled down from nine to eight thousand feet as I watched, whilst the map showed over three thousand below us. I was about to speak when he turned his mouth to a voice-pipe, and shouted something down it to the interior of the machine. He made a remark to Dudley about being ready in a moment.

I looked backwards through the transverse bulkhead doors, and saw the foremost half-dozen men slinging their strange bundles to their backs, and crawling thuswise to tiny doors, one on either hand of the fuselage.

Dudley smiled as I watched, astonished.

The leading soldier opened the door, and, to my amazement, crawled out on to the surface of the lower plane.

I watched his movements through the side-panel of the pilot's cockpit, as he braced

every muscle against the huge push of the wind blast.

He went out slowly, hand over hand, along a steel rail which I had not noticed before, and which ran from strut-foot to strut-foot along the wing.

As he crawled under the shaft and gearing of the port propeller into the darkness out of sight, I watched the next man.

Both were now wearing their sheepskin coats, and had bound their chins up in the folds of their headgear. Across each man's chest, slung to the harness of the queer bundle which now was white and glistening on his back, slanted a long sheath knife.

The second man, moving with visible effort, braced a foot against a cable anchorage, and released a hand. He opened a door in the plane beneath him, and crawled slowly through it. Whilst the upper part of him was still visible, he fumbled till he found a big hook of bright steel attached somehow to his gear, and clipped it to a bar in the opening of the wing. Slowly then he crawled downwards out of sight, shutting the trap behind him.

A glance behind the pilot's back showed more men thus engaged out on the right

wing. Dudley said, "Six at a time, Colonel," and I heard a voice address the pilot through the pipe.

He glanced at his map and peered again downwards through the panel before him. After a few seconds' pause, his left hand went to his linked throttle levers. The roar of the engines became less, and we felt the great machine sink below us.

Picked out by the moon's strong shadow, trees, bushes, and boulders on the ground grew rapidly more definite. The altimeter needle jerked back again and again. I noticed the figure five on its dial out of the corner of my eye, as all agog I watched the pilot.

His hand was now on the toggled end of a long cable by his right side. Dudley exchanged a word with him, then told me shortly to look out at the wing tip. The pilot pulled his toggle sharply a foot towards him, paused a second, pulled it again, and again a third time.

Out from below the wing there shot downwards in eerie fashion a dark mass. I caught my breath as I realised it was a man. I lost sight of him, and the rope that trailed behind him, and suddenly my eye caught him again

from the sheen of the great white umbrella of a parachute that opened swaying above him.

The engine's note swelled to a roar again as we turned sharply to the left. Below I saw six parachutes all swinging and rotating to earth at different heights and distances.

"Going down wind now," said Dudley, and as he spoke the pilot banked and turned again, and the ground sped streakily across the lower panels. Men were still moving in the belly of the machine behind us. The pilot throttled his engines once more, and the process was repeated, though my heart was far less in my mouth this time. Six more parachutes spread white and spun below us.

We turned again for a third time, and Dudley left me, saying, as he expressed it, that he was to "deplane" now. He crawled aft to put on his gear, and I was left alone with the pilot and the never-resting but dumb mechanic. I felt a little relieved that Dudley had not invited me to don the parachute harness.

We dropped in this wise four batches each of six men, including Dudley; this emptied the aeroplane except for us three.

I ejaculated something to express to the

pilot my admiration of the spirit with which the men had gone to this horrifying leap into the blackness of the night. "Well, you know," he answered, "parachutes are pretty safe nowadays. Barely one fatality in two thousand descents. It's a very different thing from the old days."

I had not quite realised that the other three machines that carried B Company had already performed their task. My companion enlightened me. "The next flight with C Company will not be along for nearly ten minutes yet, so I will take you down low, and you can watch the men landing. It may amuse you."

He throttled down again, and flew up along the river-bed of the valley bottom. Several parachutes were still in the air, and as they landed their cargo, bumping and dragging their man along the ground, I realised the use of the long sheath knife. One man went straight into the bushy top of a small tree, and from the swaying of the boughs as he cut himself loose from his trappings, I deduced that it might be a thorny one.

We flew back to our aerodrome in much less time than the outward journey had taken us. I must confess that I felt much relieved

as I stepped out again to meet Colonel Quintin. "You've been just fifty-five minutes," he said. I should not have been surprised if we had taken that number of hours.

II.

"The reserve companies of the two battalions are close by here. The B.O.'s have very kindly offered us a shake-down for the night. The pilots of the reserve machines are here too. After all these hours in the fresh air, no doubt you would like a spot of supper," said Colonel Quintin. "To-morrow," he added, "you will see Act ii., Scene 1, of our little drama."

We walked together past a grove of plane-trees, through which a pleasant little brook trickled and bubbled between grassy banks. In a few minutes we sat before a roaring and very welcome log-fire in a big wooden-raftered room. Half a dozen young officers in khaki and a like number in the blue of the Air Force made us welcome.

A great dish of stewed mutton was washed down by rum and milk, and I felt then that Richard was himself again.

Quintin and I were too busy eating and drinking to talk much, but he explained that fourteen machines made each trip carrying three companies of a battalion, the two odd machines carrying the mortar platoon, signallers, stretcher-bearers, and battalion headquarters.

Two battalions were being used that night, making about three hundred and twenty officers and men each. This required four trips by twelve machines, four more being kept in reserve.

Colonel Quintin was yawning as we turned in, so I did not worry him with my query as to the soundness or otherwise of maintaining a number of highly specialised battalions, whose equipment, training, and organisation were clearly unsuited to regular warfare.

We were up distinctly before the sun, and soon speeding down again in the car out of our park-like green valley into a more arid and sandy countryside. We travelled perhaps fifty miles thus, due west, over a passable metalled road. It took us now into rough black foothills, under the rambling lichened crenelations of a mediæval castle-fortress, and the car roared across a lofty

steel-girder bridge which spanned the river that surged through a wide gorge.

The hills fell back from our left, and the road ran through a multitude of stony dry stream beds athwart our course in a barren treeless plain.

In about half an hour more we left the main road, with its whitewashed milestones, and branched sharply north to a broad swirling river. The car was manœuvred on to a great wooden ferry-boat, and carried across by the force of the current. The boat carried a pulley on a wire cable, and the stream was ingeniously utilised to do the work.

Another rutty country track met us as we landed. We bumped along this through a more fertile countryside and many villages whose narrow lanes were crowded with cattle, goats, and small crimson-capped boys, who saluted like drill-sergeants. Here and there the bright orange head-shawl of a buxom woman caught the eye, set off by her huge black trousers and bright eyes. Our driver recked little of the life and limbs of His Majesty's lieges, and it was barely ten when we drew up in the midst of a little bivouac before a square-towered stone fort perched on a spur of the foothills. Another hos-

pitable and bearded colonel welcomed us to breakfast in a room of the post.

Colonel Chamberlayne, for such was his name, explained as we ate that two more battalions, a mountain battery, and a squadron of cavalry, would move out at about noon due north towards the trans-frontier group of villages which had been the objective of the aeroplane-carried battalions of the previous night. He added that they were probably fighting with the tribesmen at that moment.

His force, now in bivouac at Bringan, would advance to a position to cover the last few miles of the other's withdrawal through the hills, and to help the probably exhausted men to get their wounded away.

I seized the opportunity to voice my doubt of the night before.

Colonel Chamberlayne reflected before he answered.

"That controversy was very much on the tapis in 1920 and 1921, when people's minds were still full of the Great War.

"One school of soldiers, mostly with experience restricted to France or Mesopotamia, demanded that all units of the Army should be equally efficient, trained for all-round

work, and capable of going anywhere and doing anything.

"This sounded very well, but was really a counsel of perfection. They forgot that 'le mieux est l'ennemi du bien,' and that there is such a thing as human nature. They had their way in Waziristan in 1919 and 1920, and the result was that it took scores of thousands of men, and millions of pounds, to compete with about 3500 ragged Mahsuds.

"Bitterly opposed to this lot was the political party, whose slogan seemed to be the blessed word Khassadar, vulgarly pronounced Kussadar. This party wanted the Army to go right away, and that they should be allowed to carry on with a sort of casual labourer with a rifle, hired from day to day as it were. Him they called a Khassadar, in imitation of the Afghans, and to make all safe insisted that he provide his own rifle, so that in case he deserted there was no harm done. He might steal the rifle from the regular Army.

"The whole question was much complicated in those days by the Indian legislator, to whom a Mr Samuels had given, as by act divine, the right to sway an Imperial policy he did not comprehend, and to control

an army enlisted from a race as different from his noble self as a Norwegian is from a Korean. The few officers who survived from the brisk days when the old Punjab Frontier Force kept the border healthy and happy were either too cynical to join issue, or too lacking in lingual agility for those demagogic days.

"The Solons of Hindustan vociferated so urgently that at last regular troops were withdrawn from the trans-border tracts and a stop-gap compromise put in to replace them. These were called Scouts, and were the old Frontier Militia under a new name, but slightly modified by having a larger proportion of men from within the border.

"They had three very weak points. Firstly, they tapped the recruitment of the best fighting races without contributing anything to the strength of the Army in a great war, or benefiting by its traditions. Secondly, they lacked the proportion of men from Hither-Indus—Punjabis, Dogras, and Sikhs —that the old Piffers had found practically essential; and thirdly, they were controlled by a different administration from that which had to co-operate with them when anything really serious happened. In time, in spite

of vested interests and political shibboleths, common-sense and logic prevailed, much assisted by the G.C.U. This was described by a lad who had swallowed the dictionary as 'a monarchical revolution carried out by an imperialistic collection of socialist aristocrats.'

"People were at last persuaded to recognise three main principles, which outweighed all the others. These were that every young able-bodied man of the real fighting races should be available to join the Expeditionary Force in a big war; secondly, that frontier fighting, being a "strategic detachment," should be done with a minimum of men, but those highly trained specialists, organised and equipped for the job; thirdly, that over-regularisation had destroyed every preceding army in its turn.

"The problem was to dovetail these principles in with each other. It was done by making the first two battalions of each regiment into Expeditionary Force battalions, designed for regular wars only. The third battalion in nearly all Punjab regiments, and in the old Piffer regiments the fourth and fifth as well, was made into a 'savage' battalion, such as you saw last night. It is designed for just one job in ordinary times, but on a

general mobilisation it does two. As well as keeping its own section of the border in hand, it sends off its younger men as a draft to one of the first two, and then catches and trains all the recruits it can, to make more drafts.

"The senior of our regiments has a specially enlisted battalion for aerial use in countries farther afield yet, and an officer-cadet battalion besides."

"I think I understand," I put in; "but surely the men of your savage battalions are not much use in first-class warfare?"

"Well," he answered, "every man serves in one of the E.F. battalions first, for three years, as well as doing his initial year in the training battalion. This keeps the E.F. infantry young. So he is a fully-trained soldier on regular lines before he goes to the savage battalion at all. We have realised that training for frontier warfare included all a regular soldier's training, and a good deal besides.

"The officers and N.C.O.'s all come from the E.F. battalions of their own regiments too, and do four years at a stretch with the savage battalions.

"Most British Service soldiers honestly believed that 'Irregulars' could not stand

casualties. We looked up the figures for the Siege of Delhi and found that the Guides and other Piffer battalions there had stood nearly 40 per cent of killed in three months."

"How many British officers do you have in a battalion, then?" I asked.

"That depends," he said, smiling. "We have a lack of uniformity in many things that would turn a sergeant-major purple with yellow spots. The E.F. battalions have a war establishment of twenty, not counting the doctor.

"Twelve platoons out of the sixteen are commanded by junior British subalterns, but each company has a subadar major who fills the place of the second captain in a British company. Incidentally," he said, "our E.F. war establishments are identical with those of Imperial units, man for man and job for job. We have solved the old follower question too. To get back to the point. The savage battalions have a C.O., second in command, adjutant and quartermaster—British, and usually three out of the four company commanders. The training battalion has twelve British officers, and the militia and garrison battalions only three each. This gives plenty of room for the native officers

to rise to seconds in command, and retire as lieutenant-colonels. I did not mention the militia before. They are the 11th and 12th battalions, and primarily draft-finders for big wars. The men do three months' training a year at regimental headquarters, which nowadays never moves."

I could not but admit that the whole scheme sounded very logical, elastic, and sensible. I could see now that for Imperial purposes every young man was made available, and none were wasted or diverted to side issues.

"There are one or two more points that might interest you," he went on. "Several old gunners had paralytic seizures when we demanded a pack battery to be welded into each regimental group. When we pointed out that the old Punjab Frontier mountain-batteries were not, and never had been, part of the Royal Artillery, they could not very well refuse.

"They made a terrific to-do about it, and said that they would very soon cease to be gunners, and become a moth-eaten sort of trench-mortar men.

"We pointed out that co-operation with the infantry is more important than trade

mysteries, and a lot of the gunners agreed with us, so we had our way.

"They still groan a bit now and then, but the Pack Artillery School has to keep them up to the mark technically, and there is no more chat about bad co-operation in the field. They still have Royal Artillery officers seconded to our regiments, just like the West African Frontier Force. The recruits do six months at regimental headquarters, and six more at the Divisional Artillery School.

"I forgot to mention that the regimental group has three cavalry squadrons in it, a field ambulance, and some small supply units, which are all part of the regiment. They are all administered by an institution called the Regimental District Military Association, which is just like your Territorial Force Associations, only rather more so. It gets a share of the Army Estimates in peace time, and has to find everything out of that. It was not until we got this finance business decentralised and localised that we got the better of corruption. Incidentally the senior officers of the Savage, the Training, and the Territorial battalions are magistrates in their own recruiting districts, and the Objector to military service

is disfranchised, as in England. This helps a lot.

"I am afraid I have bored you tremendously with all this," he ended.

It had interested me immensely, and I said so very emphatically as he led me outside through the steel gateway of the fort.

The morning was drawing on and the men under the walls had struck their little bivouacs, and were now putting on their equipment and cleaning their rifles.

The equipment and dress of this battalion was just the same as that of the one I had seen the night before, and it bore a very famous title in silver on its shoulder-straps.

A pack battery of howitzers was saddling up behind it, normal enough except for the small number of its mules. I saw the reason for that later. On the right was a squadron of cavalry, and Chamberlayne led me towards them. He explained that he had arranged for Quintin and myself to be given horses to ride out with the column.

I saw, with a little misgiving, that all the animals were stallions of a hard and wiry appearance. An orderly led a couple towards us. Their saddles were curious affairs, consisting apparently of a bare tree overlaid with

a folded sheepskin. A pair of saddle-bags were slung across its seat; it had wooden stirrups, whilst a plain snaffle served to direct the mustang.

The men of the squadron were dressed like the infantry, but with full-sized puttees strapped with buckskin, an automatic carbine slung over the left shoulders of half the men with a very broad sling, and a straight sword carried obliquely under the left thigh.

In answer to my questions, Chamberlayne told me that the man's mess-tin, water-bottle, and the horse's grain were carried in the big saddle-bags, as also a shackle, picketing-peg, and chain.

"Great thing about these little nags," he said, "is that they live on anything; you can't knock them up, and they climb like goats. Kabulis and Waziris this lot mostly."

"What about your regular cavalry?" I asked.

"There aren't any," he replied shortly. "We have fast whippets to work over what they used to call cavalry country, and that's all."

The little column fell in and moved off in a very few minutes. Quintin and I rode with Chamberlayne at his invitation.

A stony track led us into the foothills. On each hand were low rolling spurs speckled with wild olives and euphorbia.

Little knots of cavalry galloped ahead from cover to cover over the most unpleasant-looking ground, with no apparent regard for the feet of their mounts.

Our own nags, by the same token, expended much of their time and attention in hostilities with their neighbours. As the path steepened, they began to devote their spare breath to the business of the climb.

We had gradually worked our way into a valley whose walls closed in on either side. Great boulders littered the track and the hillsides, on which scrubby cedars stood out among the olives, whilst an occasional birch or pine rose above both.

For the last few minutes I caught a distant glimpse or two of cavalry scrambling about among the rocks that seemed really too rugged even for goats.

Then the flash of a heliograph came from the gully ahead, and I realised that we had a fair-sized body of infantry as an advanced-guard.

The little handfuls of cavalry fell back as knots of infantrymen moved nimbly up the

stark spurs to the hill-tops above. The handfuls became troops, and soon we passed the whole squadron halted in the torrent bed on our left. The cavalry closed up in the rear of the column, a troop detaching itself to follow Chamberlayne.

He invited Quintin and myself to trot ahead with him to the advanced-guard to watch the piquetting of the heights.

Our ponies carried us at an ambling trot over the most atrocious stones to the infantry companies ahead.

They moved steadily on in file whilst their commander leapt about from rock to rock, followed by a trio of nimble signallers. As he watched the hillside intently, shouting an occasional order through a megaphone, I followed his gaze. Quintin pointed out to me that the placing of a piquet was not a mere scramble up to the crest-line.

Each section or so was supported by a similar body, which put butt to shoulder in readiness to fire at any one who opposed the advance of its comrades. As one advanced the other halted in position, and so alternately till the summit was reached.

I was surprised to notice that all this was done without checking the march of the

column. Not less amazing was the speed and surefootedness with which every man moved about on the craggy hillsides. My mind went back to the slow and stolid trudge of the Zermatt guides of my Swiss holiday climbs.

Another point that caught my eye was the remarkable absence of transport. Quintin explained that each man carried only what I had seen; the officers and the cavalry were allowed what they could carry on their ponies, whilst the pack battery took just the bare minimum of mules necessary to carry their guns and ammunition plus only two spares for each piece. If there were many casualties among the gun-mules, an ammunition load and its saddle would be jettisoned to give room for the gun-load.

In addition, there were a bare thirty ambulance ponies. Each carried a bundle of bamboos and canvas, which Quintin explained could be assembled into either what the Canadians call travois, or else into a horse litter to hold two men, carried by two pack animals in tandem. Besides this, they carried a reserve of drinking water in canvas bags, which could be thrown away to give place to wounded.

He added that only very seriously wounded

men were allowed in the litters; it was a matter of regimental pride that even seriously wounded men should remain in the ranks. "Where valleys are broad and fighting lasts longer, we use ambulance tanks for some of the work. As for sick," he said, "we have no followers and no wasters, so we have no sick. It simply isn't done."

Besides this, there were a few herculean individuals armed only with a pistol. They were each expected to carry a wounded man without assistance. The pistol was mainly to coerce any prisoners captured into helping with this transportation.

I was rather interested in the signalling. I could not help noticing that what seemed quite a long message was transmitted in a very few flag-waves, not more than about a dozen Morse letters.

I saw no heliographs carried. Quintin told me that the flash-signal I had seen just before was produced by a small steel pocket-mirror carried by each signaller merely to attract the attention of the distant station. After this the message was sent, sometimes by flag, but more usually on a light shutter. A few electric lamps of diminutive size were carried, the current for them being generated

by a hand-worked lever in the manner of the familiar pocket-lamp.

"The tactical code," went on Quintin, "is always used inside battalions. It is a combination of the naval tactical code for fleet exercises and the code we used with the Popham panel. You can send a long message with it in about thirty seconds; a man can be taught the work in a week, as he only has to learn a dozen Morse letters, and no one has yet found a tactical message that did not fit the code. Still, there was a terrific amount of pig-headedness to be overcome before we got away from the old-fashioned semaphore and Morse spelled out letter by letter.

"The Signal Service, of course, stick to Morse, and they sometimes lend us half a dozen men for these counter-raids, mostly to communicate with the aeroplanes."

Meanwhile the column advanced, the path became steeper and rougher, the torrent bed shrank to a crack, the hill-tops became closer to us and lower, dotted with birch, and soon I caught a glimpse of a notch in the crest-line. This was the pass of Stor Sghar, our first goal.

It was, as Quintin estimated, not more than

about five hundred feet above us, when I first heard the very distinct popping of rifle-fire ahead. As we approached, it increased to a very brisk crackle, each report reverberating again and again amongst the yellow-brown cliffs.

The gun-mules broke into a scrambling trot, and the battery came like lightning into action on the pass. On either hand I could just see an occasional head or the glint of a polished rifle-butt that indicated an infantry piquet.

I placed myself out of the way behind Chamberlayne, and looked down the pine-shrouded ravine to the north, to the broad valley athwart it below.

Down on the bridle-track, amongst the scrub, I caught an occasional glimpse of a knot of men. Lower down still on the spurs Quintin pointed out to me tall standards of green and red. Under each stood or crouched a drummer or two, whose music came faintly up to us.

A word or two jerked out amongst the line of guns on my left. The droning shriek of the twenty-pound shell followed the bang of a full charge, and, it seemed minutes after, the thud of its burst came up to us.

Another followed, and then another. I

saw the black spout of the high explosive go up on the ridge close beside the red standard. Its steeple-like, gilt-crested top wavered against the sky. A salvo followed, four bursts started up all around it, and when the black fumes cleared away the banner was no more seen.

Now out from the scrub in front staggered sweating and exhausted a string of men, each carrying a wounded comrade by the "fireman's lift."

Our stretcher-bearers darted down the slope, seized their burdens, whilst the tired carriers threw themselves exhausted alongside the track.

The travois and the litters had been put together, and soon the wounded were safely loaded, whilst a doctor busied himself with fresh dressings and a hypodermic syringe.

Our battery behind its screen of great boulders fired slowly; soon the double plop of our rifles was heard on either hand, and the Kotal filled with a widespread line of our infantry. Behind it lay prone two or three companies of reserves.

I could now see groups of the Barak Regiment a bare couple of hundred yards below us, swarming up the spurs.

Here and there, too, were knots in blue-grey moving from cover to cover.

In an instant shouts came up, white steel flashed in the noontide sun, and breathlessly I watched men fighting desperately, broad knife against slim bayonet.

Suddenly bullets splashed on the stones amongst us. Quintin shouted "Look out," and the gleam of knives came from a fold of the rocks a stone's-throw to my right. I remember two vivid pictures, as some one thrust a welcome rifle into my hands. My world was filled for an instant with the fierce blue eyes and bristling moustache of a tall blue-smocked tribesman, linen-trousered like a Viking, and with the gold-inlaid silver-chased hilt of the curved sword that a platoon commander grasped at my side. I fired as in a dream, and the world filled with greenish khaki. The platoon commander, with his foot on a tribesman's throat, lugged his blade out of the split skull and wiped it on a tuft of grass. His men knelt, taking quick snap-shots at an occasional survivor of the rush who slunk back from boulder to boulder.

"Near thing," said Quintin.

Groups of the Baraks came over the crest, many with bloody bayonets, and some with

bandaged limbs. Quietly they formed into platoons, lying close in regular lines just behind the Kotal's ridge. An aeroplane droned overhead.

Dudley came up, smiling quizzically as usual, to Chamberlayne.

"Followed us up a bit that time," he said. "Seven killed so far, and about four of the wounded pretty bad, but they have had a jolt or two."

"Right," said Chamberlayne; "we'll stop their laughing in church." He said a word to his signallers, and soon the company leaders and the commander of the battery sat or knelt in a line at his elbow.

"I'm going to counter-attack. Dudley will take over the piquets along on either side of the Kotal, the cavalry will do those lower down towards Surkhawi.

"Dudley, you fix that up as soon as you have collected your battalion.

"When all your men are relieved, Allardyce, push on towards Kambela there in support of my counter-attack.

"Houston, I want you to limber up a section to come along with me. When that gets into action, you can bring along the other. We shall probably spend the night

out; then you will see what you will see, my dear Rivers."

He turned to his adjutant, who wrote out a message for the signallers to transmit up to the waiting aeroplane.

The dash and *élan* of that counter-attack were admirable. The men of the reserve companies darted over the Kotal ridge, and through its line of men, whilst the last groups of the Baraks were still herding in a few prisoners carrying wounded.

The tribesmen were fairly surprised, and the weight of that downhill swoop swept away their resistance.

Every man seemed to act for himself, yet formed part of a supple whole. Pairs and threes of men dashed into crannies of rocks with the bayonet. Bayonet men emerged, but no swordsmen. Two guns fired more rapidly, whilst long-armed stalwarts flung chase, breech, axle, and cradle on to the alert mules of the section. A supporting platoon at hand opened a dropping fire with the little shells of its hand-howitzers where a group of desperate men held on behind the piled stones of a little stronghold.

Soon the fight drifted away from us, as the winter sun began to sink in the heavens,

tinting near-by patches of snow with pink and crimson.

The Baraks, a little tired and sweat-grimed perhaps, but still smiling and joking, were concentrated in a close formation. The open collars of their smocks showed a sharp line of sunburn across the neck. The second section of guns was already making a move when Quintin called for our hobbled ponies and suggested an advance.

We rode on down a boulder-strewn path, steeper than that which we had ascended, between sloping walls of dark fir.

The fight moved fast, the tribesmen were on the run, and Chamberlayne, scenting out the vital point as if by instinct, kept them moving. Once or twice some little band of stalwarts endeavoured to hold a cluster of rocks or a ruined hut. Each time a round or two from the mortars or the guns and a steady bitter hail of little one-pound shells started them from their bolt-holes. The ready bayonets or the cool deliberately-aimed fire of the jawans lashed them each time.

Matters moved quickly, and yet it was well on in the afternoon before Chamberlayne called a halt.

"Kambela village is just round that spur,"

he said. "We will bivouac by this spring. Tell the signallers to put out the strips; and Allardyce, you send a company to get what they can out of the village. The other company commanders, come along with me, and I will show you where I want the night piquets."

The gunners off-loaded at once, and were soon watering their mules and cutting firewood for their evening meal. A company piled arms and followed their example. Curls of welcome grey smoke went up in the chill evening air. A grunting noise came from the heavens, and a signaller rose and doubled to the long yellow and red streamers of a message-bag.

Soon the companies who had formed the Kotal piquets marched in with a springy step.

Quintin remarked: "You will now see something unusual. First of all, there will not be any camp, except for the gunners, this one company, and headquarters. All the rest go out on piquet, and manage to be quite as comfortable, as they have big piquets.

"The next thing is the Elijah business. You may have remembered that the men took only half a day's rations."

Almost as he spoke I heard a dull crash in the fir-trees behind me. I looked round, and a jawan ran to the spot and disentangled an obvious hundred-pound bag of flour. "That's enough for a company," said Quintin.

Aeroplanes in ones and twos sailed against the sky, their klaxons sounding, and every few seconds there thudded down a bag of meal or of barley. Sometimes a small cotton parachute wafted down a box of high-explosive shells or of rifle cartridges. One or two of the bags split on sharp rocks, but it was a useful quantity that ration parties from the piquets now started to bear up the hills to their companies, along with clusters of filled water-bottles.

Soon, from round the shoulder by Kambela, there came a vociferating procession.

A gesticulating greybeard led the way. Behind him straggled sheep and goats, prodded and exhorted by laughing soldiers. Then came shaggy ponies and mules bearing weird bundles, and last of all Allardyce, solemnly wrangling with three ancient and irate beldames and two more bent patriarchs.

The bundles disclosed hay and barley, milk materialised in earthen shards, whilst the sheep and goats seemed to melt away

into the hands of various young N.C.O.'s of the "Q" branch.

"All clear in the village, sir," said Allardyce to Chamberlayne, "but I left a piquet there. Methuselah & Co. are a bit annoyed, though, about their live stock and so on. Will you talk to them?"

The hubbub died down as Chamberlayne, in his capacity of a Justice of the Peace, addressed the ancient deputation.

The descent of heavy consignments of eatables and ammunition from the sky had now ceased, and I had leisure to reflect on the simplicity of it all. I asked Quintin about the actual figures. He said: "A force of 2500 fighting men and a hundred animals needs only about seven thousand pounds of dry rations and grain a day if it finds firewood, meat, and fodder for itself. Add two thousand pounds more for ammunition and so on, which is about a fair day's consumption, and two of the big Vinci machines that dropped the Barak battalion can do the trick.

"As a matter of fact, so far we have always used smaller machines, doing a couple of trips. You could not do it if you had mobs of animals, of course; but if you are fed

from the air, you don't need mobs of animals, or men to look after them."

"I can't understand why people didn't think of that before," I said.

"Well, they did," he replied. "They did a little bit that way as far back as 1915 in Kut-el-Amara. The trouble was that everybody had bombing on the brain. They did not realise that your lad of Yaghistan was not a fat over-civilised German, and that after the first once or twice, he looked on bombing from the air much as a London householder looks on his pipes bursting when it freezes."

"It is a pity it was not started sooner. I can quite see how it must add to the mobility of a force operating in this sort of country," I said.

"Well, I'm not sure that the Air Force did not think it a bit *infra dig.* at first. However, they always get a bit of bombing to do in these shows, and some ground strafing. It doesn't hurt the Pathan much, but it pleases them, and it is something to write home about to their best girls. Of course, you must have aircraft for big wars, so it costs nothing to use them for the little ones."

Later on, when it grew dark, a small air-

ship drifted silently down wind over the camp, its engines stopped. Ready hands sprang to its mooring guys, and inside ten minutes it had risen phantom-like again with four badly wounded jawans in its nacelles.

Chamberlayne joined us at a somewhat Robinson Crusoeish but hearty supper of grilled mutton, girdle-cakes, and rum omelettes, operated upon with aluminium mugs and clasp-knives. He hummed contentedly as he told us that his piquets were all out in good positions, well fed, and happy.

"I think we have stopped their sniggering in the synagogue—I mean the Kambela people's. They lost a lot when the Baraks pounced on the villages the other side of the valley before the morning was properly aired. They lost a lot more during our counter-attack. Our fellows brought in twenty deaders from this valley only, and a dozen badly wounded. I don't think they will bother us to-morrow much."

The morning proved him right.

There had been a little sniping at the piquets during the night, and in our bivouac a gun-mule was hit. The gunner captain made far more fuss about the mule than he would have over losing a dozen men, but

that is the way of gunners all the world over.

We slept on beds of pine branches wrapped in poshtins. The men lit great fires at the first chill streak of day, before which we crouched with steaming mugs of cocoa.

A short half-hour saw the column under way once more, climbing steeply back to the Kotal. Piquets guarded our flanks, now and then some marauder fired a random shot, here and there a jawan stumbled over the grisly signs of the day before; but we reached the crest by ten in a warm and welcome sun, to eat a meal and halt an hour.

The march down the south side of the range was quiet, but I for one was glad to be back in the post of Amazai, and wallowing in a hot bath after two long days in the saddle.

Outside there gradually mounted the stamp and swing and spin as the Khattaks of the Shalozans worked up to the heat of their reel, and the gyrating sword-blades gleamed in the bonfire's light to the skirl of the pipes.

I parted from my cheery hosts next day with no little regret, to face the journey on that barbarous railway down to the port of Karachi.

I had seen a good deal in those few days which filled my thoughts for a good many weeks to come.

In Whitehall I found a letter from Quintin describing the submission of the Kambela tribesmen. He ended: ". . . they had all the fighting they wanted those two days, but I am afraid we shall have to put it across them again soon. The maliks all came to the jirga frou-frouing loudly in white silk trousers made from our parachutes. Now the whole tribe has tapped the supply we dropped on to them, and it is making them dreadfully cock-a-hoop. Besides, their fair damsels want silk trousers too."

THE FORBIDDEN FORTRESS OF KHURASAN

THE FORBIDDEN FORTRESS OF KHURASAN.

We had been told that the Kelat of the Emperor Nadir Shah was a very marvellous place. When we actually set eyes on it, the most extravagant descriptions seemed less than the truth.

The Persians, who, like the Chinese, attach an overwhelming importance to fortresses, shroud it in the greatest mystery, and use every effort to prevent strangers approaching it. Even travellers with a great influence behind them had failed to get inside. However, in 1919 we were by way of being self-invited allies of the Persians, and as our task was then the defence of Khurasan against the Bolsheviks, they could not very well refuse our commander's entry into Kelat-i-Nadiri when he asked for it. All the same, they made a great to-do about it, and politely rubbed in the fact that they were conferring

a very great honour not accorded to every one.

To save time, we sent our horses and spare kit a day's march ahead, escorted by a few men of the Guides, under Havildar Aslam, a much-scarred Yusafzai veteran of Artois and Africa. Next day the Colonel and I set out in the one and only "tin-Lizzie" that the force owned, across the waving green corn of the plain, past the blue-tiled dome of Khwaja Rabbi's shrine that glinted in the morning sun, to Razan. The Ford clanked back to Meshed, and mounting our horses we rode on by a rough track into the mountains. The month was April, and it had begun to get hot in the middle of the day in that latitude (36° N.), so we pushed along. The several ranges that here compose the Kara Dagh run athwart the trail, and this scrambles laboriously up the gorges of the streams that burst their way abruptly through the iron cliffs. Almost at once we found ourselves in the first of these grey-walled defiles.

The stream-bed was dry, and though the track was strewn with boulders and rough rocks, our horses could trot. We soon climbed over the little ridge at the head of the gorge,

past the tall thin headstones of a Persian graveyard, to the shallow valley full of smiling corn and barley in the midst of which lay Kardeh, the last Persian village. As we halted a few minutes to renew the clenches on a loose shoe, the pleasant-spoken Katkhuda brought us a tray of melons. Feroz, my young orderly, smiled his engaging Punjabi smile. He liked melons, though he remarked that they had the disadvantage of making the ears so wet. My dear old mare, too, was passionately addicted to melons on a hot day. She had a different method of dealing with them. Gripping the tip of a lengthy slice in her pearl-like teeth, she would flap the other end upwards against her velvet nose. She found it delightfully cool, and so in her case this pastime took the place of the powder-puff to which the biped fair is so devoted. With little sighs of regret, Feroz and Marushka tore themselves away from their third water-melon to scramble into the next defile. This astonishing wall-sided gully, the Tang-i-Shikasteh, took us eventually right on to the uplands of the main range. The way led up a succession of rough gorges in between vertically scarped cliffs. Here and there we passed a hamlet,

such as Al, embowered in leafy green plane-trees; and once, where the defile widened out a little to fill with vegetation, perched on the very summit of a hill just to the west there was an immense rock, with sides so absolutely perpendicular that at first sight it seemed like a building of Cyclopean masonry. On our own side of the valley, deep on a great rock-face, in flowing classical Persian script, was carved a legend. It described how a monarch of the old times, riding up this fair valley, perhaps on his way to Merv, the "Queen of the World," laid a wager with his retinue as to who should guess the weight of the immense stone. The Shah won. Kings commanded respect in those days, and the stone was dubbed "the rock of thirty pounds' weight," doubtless to commemorate the estimate of the Court fool.

More gorges followed, flanked now with yellow cliffs several hundred feet high, and filled with low scrub and rank weeds. At last, late in the afternoon, we came to the stones of a ruin where two valleys joined. The right held the bridle-track to the Kelat, but up the valley to the left lay the little hamlet where we proposed to spend the night. The map was vague, to say the least

of it: the omission of a 6000-foot mountain range and the misplacement of a village by six or eight miles were as nothing to it. So we had to plod several miles up the unmapped side valley of Balghur before we found the wind-swept hamlet of that name, perched in tiers on a steep-ridged spur several hundred feet above the valley bottom. As we climbed in the dusk up the narrow goat-track several figures loomed past in tall black sheep-skin bonnets like the bearskins of the Foot Guards, and in long wide-sleeved robes of wadded cotton and crimson silk. It was a jolt to our Occidental ideas to find that this village and its surrounding valley were inhabited by Turks. Very soon our horses were tethered, and champing good dry lucerne under the bala-khaneh of a two-storied guest-house, wherein a cheery samovar was a-boil and supper a-cooking under Feroz's able management and Transatlantic hustle.

We found that these Turks took no interest in the wars waged by their Osmanli cousins, and we were quite sorry to say good-bye to them next morning. A short-cut over a granite ridge took us back to the main valley, and almost at once we were plunged in the most gloomy and forbidding gorge of all,

the Zao-i-Pirzan (the gorge of the old woman). At one place the black cliff walls are so close together that a loaded mule has only just room to pass.

The path, beset with thorny scrub, began to be much steeper, and in due course we came on to a pleasant grassy upland like the South Downs, but of some 9000 feet in altitude. An easy little pass led to the great chasm of an open valley running sharply down towards the plains of Turkistan, and draining towards the Murghab, the river of Merv. The path sidled along the flank of the range, a few hundred feet below the steeply scarped crest, and several hundred feet above the stream-bed, down to which the grassy hillsides swept in giddy slopes. A rocky razor-backed col, with the Turkish name of Diveh Boiun, the camel's neck, took us abruptly into the next valley to the north-west, and from its knife-edge we looked down on great open rolling downs, in the midst of which, by a dew pond, nestled the tiny Turkish village of Bardeh. In company with a great number of little bed-fellows, we billeted ourselves here, and looked forward to the unfolding of the great mystery on the morrow, which should see us in the secret fastness.

A few miles more of downs, in a clayey soil, soon gave way to a pass very easy of ascent. Then to the north, the track plunged down into an extraordinary valley, an almost perfect V, of which the sides are formed by flat rock faces, tectonic strata all tipped askew by some ancient upheaval. To this succeeded a torrent-crossing, and the passage of another rocky sheer-walled gorge, the Tang-i-Jaour (the Gully of the Infidel). It might well have been the Valley of the Roc. Suddenly across the cramped sky-line, and the fantastic silhouette of the craggy sides, as it opened to our view, there sprang a straight-crested toothed line of stark cliffs—the thousand-foot rampart of the Kelat. Mute with astonishment, we rode on past the tiny poplar-bowered mountain hamlet of Hammam Kala, to meet a black-bonneted cavalcade, cross bandoliered, with Trokh-Linie, Berdanka, and Osmanli Mauser across their backs, that had ridden out from the stronghold. The Khan had sent his eldest son to welcome us, with the escort that this rugged Alsatia demands. In the unending skirmishes of Turk, Kurd, and Turkoman, they do not forget that "whoso tarrieth on the draw, and landeth not his bullet on the correct button,

that man shall be planted ere his prime." The Khan's son was a clean-featured lad of about eighteen, whose face but barely betrayed his Turkish race.

He gave up his father's hospitable message with the natural courtesy of a boy of good family, and we cantered along, ahead of the wild squealing stallions, leaping the stone walls of tiny boulder-littered fields, under the shale slopes that ran down from that amazing line of cliffs.

Not the least wonderful was that it ran for a good many miles in either direction in a perfectly straight grey line, as if planned by a draughtsman, to spring sheer up, ignoring the green folds and valleys and hills of the natural lie of the country, which seemed to surge, like wintry breakers against a sea-wall, about its flank. Here and there a watch-tower, outlining itself high up against the sky, showed the hand of man.

Round a corner, past a clump of infrequent hardy trees, we rode over a shingly stream into a frowning black gorge. Across its gloomy forbidding midst there stretched a mighty arched wall of ancient ashlar, and in this, in some bygone era, the imprisoned stream had burst a gap.

Through the gorge at last we came into the legendary cliff-girt hold.

The harshness of the scarped granite-speckled hills and bleak wind-swept spurs outside gave place in a twinkling to smiling little sunny fields bowered in trees, some of them bearing fruit, as we rode in through the "Gate of Argavan Shah," past the village at its mouth, where stood a couple of brass field-guns. Rounded, easy-sloped downs covered with good grazing came into our purview as we trotted along the narrow stone-walled lanes that divided the fields from the sheep-dotted slopes of herbage. But always in the background there frowned above the pleasant pastures the harsh crenelated line of the outer walls. Now and then some sheep-skinned man, or a woman in the local tartan-plaid that is so astonishingly Scottish, would salute the young Khan or stare wonderingly at the British officers or at the half-dozen spick-and-span Guides who rode behind them, their gleaming saddles, burnished bits, and meticulously kept arms somewhat in contrast to the raffishness of the middle-East cavalier. The tartan plaids that this tribe of Turks share with their Kurdish neighbours caused Colonel Macgregor

to speculate. He was the first, and very nearly the last, European ever to enter Kelat-i-Nadiri back in the early 'seventies. Though when one reflects that the Kurd is of the same Nordic clan that inhabits the east of Scotland, it is not difficult to comprehend that the same tradition has kept the tartan weave alive in the two far-sundered mountain regions.

In just over a couple of miles from the entrance, we came to Ja-i-Gumbaz, the main village of the whole district, that holds the ancient palace of the Kurdish Emperor Nadir where lives the Khan of to-day. A cobbled street led through a massive gateway to a sort of outer bailey, with a stable-yard on its right, and brought us face to face with a great circular stone tower. Its base formed a sort of arcade, before which stood another ancient field-piece, whilst the cylindrical shaft of the tower ran up in cabled fluting like a Greek pillar to a height of some scores of feet.

The Khan, whose name we learned was Fatteh-ul-Mulk, led us to the guest-chambers, through a garden filled with dense foliage of Europe and tufted poplars of Asia, to the rear of the great shaft; and soon over deep

china bowls of tea we forgot the asperities of the journey in listening to the legends of this wonderful fortress.

Nadir, like Saladin, was a Kurd—not, as so many think, a Persian,—and his early youth was spent shepherding his father's flock on the wild hillsides of his native Duringar, three days' march to the westward. Coupling a throw-back to the Nordic purposefulness of his ancestors to middle Eastern savagery, perhaps acquired from a Mongoloid mother, he swept over South Asia, ruling from aristocratic Georgian Tiflis to thick-lipped Dravidian Delhi. Perhaps some of his progeny charged for the Frankish emperor under the December sun on that great day of Austerlitz, or perished on the Bérésina ice.

The Persian likes to think that Nadir was himself a Persian, and so to boast about the Persian conquest of Hindustan. Sir Percy Sykes tells us that in Shiraz in 1916 the Persians vaunted that "a hundred Kashgai could chase a thousand Indians." A little practical experience forced them ruefully to admit that "a hundred sepoys could chase a thousand Kashgais," and they might well have made it "ten thousand." For, in

common with a great many people who might be expected to know better, they had not the gumption to realise that the Indians whose faces Nadir ground into the dust are of a very different race and fibre to the Punjabi, whom the war, following up the good work of the Mutiny, has made the backbone of the army. To-day, of course, no one with any practical experience has the least doubt that a single company of Punjabi mounted infantry could overrun Persia, Bolsheviks or no Bolsheviks.

Nadir, on his return from the ravishing of Hind, came back to his native heath with loot worth, even in those days, seven millions sterling. He must have remembered the Kelat from his boyhood days, and hit on it as an ideal "keep" for himself and his booty.

He built in the valley bottom the massy stone palace at Ja-i-Gumbaz, called Mukburra-i-Nadir, and a summer villa on the breezy plateau above. Somewhere in the great area of the fastness he hid his treasure.

When he came to the unpleasant end that fate seems to reserve for despots like Nadir and Lenin, the hiding-place of the treasure-trove was lost.

I may as well put the reader out of his

anxiety at once by telling him that we did not find it; so the mighty correspondence by which we endeavour to extract our arrears of pay is still in full swing. A certain dictionary defines a soldier as a man who fights for his pay. This is a good dictionary.

Nowadays the Kelat and the district around is held in fief from the Kajar Shah by the Khan, to whose ancestors it was given on condition that they and their Turkish clan should safeguard that frontier from the raiding Turkoman of Merv and the Akhal Oasis. This is just the principle of Cossack land tenure in return for military service, and that of the old-time Rajput "Jagir": a very excellent one for tribes of an adventuring temperament. Nothing would do more good than its revival in the Punjab, where it would solve many problems, both military and civil.

Next day we climbed up the steep red-clay slopes that fringed the plateau of Khisht. One of our party was one Ali Akbar, a trooper of "B" Squadron of the Guides. The Khan recognised him at once: he had in "civil" life been one of the many distinguished bandits of Northern Khurasan. In fact, in spite of his youthful appearance, he had had a very intricate past in the band of the cele-

brated Mahmud of Nishapur, a brigand who ran to artillery and an armourer's establishment of his own. In company with his cousin Kerbelai, of the same squadron, who was wounded in the leg in the proceedings, he had taken part in the filibustering attack on the Russian Consulate of Gumbad-i-Kabus in 1912. The Khan reminded him gently about all this, to Ali Akbar's intense annoyance and the amusement of the Punjabis. He opined unkindly that as Ali Akbar now wore the Lion and the Unicorn, he had left brigandage behind him for good. "Last night ye had struck at a Border thief: to-night 'tis a man of the Guides!"

From the top of the plateau, by the little hamlet of Khisht, one of the dozen to be found inside the ramparts, we had a splendid view of the whole perimeter to its farthest point, that lay quite twelve miles away. The huge size of the place slowly began to impress itself on us, and as we climbed a peak farther to the northward, we were struck indeed with amazement at the miracle of the "enceinte." Everywhere is a complete girdle of vertical cliffs several hundred feet in height, except for the four or five narrow guarded gorges that form the "gates."

Even these are barely passable by laden camels: the one of Argavan Shah, by which we entered, and which admits the little stream that flows through the fastness, is perhaps the easiest. Its counterpart, by which the stream breaks through to the outside country, to the Atak of Turkistan, is the Darband-i-Naft, in the northern wall, closed by ramparts and towers. In the eastern scarp, farthest from us, are the two gates of Haji Bulan and Choubast, by one of which one may bring in light guns. Close at hand is the bridle-track through the village of Deh-Chah, in the north-western angle, that finds its way to the Central Asian Railway and the British battlefield of Kaakha.

Except for these, only two or three rough tracks exist by which even an agile cragsman can scramble over the cliffs. One of them ran down from under the shoulder of the peak, Kamar Khisht, of some 5000 odd feet, whereof we stood upon the crest.

The sky was clear, and the mountain rampart fell away starkly below us, so that looking down we could clearly see the armoured trains of Bolshevik and Menshevik, and the puffs of smoke that marked their not very deadly conflict.

Just in this way, more than thirty years before, O'Donovan had climbed a hill of the outer range to look down upon the battles of Skobeleff and the gallant Tekkes.

As we were about to take some photographs, the clouds descended in a wet mist, and it commenced to rain. Although it cleared up a trifle the next day, so that we were able to take a few, we never got any really good ones. We managed to get an approximate idea down on paper of the lie of the land.

Kelat-i-Nadiri, though so immensely strong by nature that it dwarfs Gibraltar, is by no means a virgin fortress. A force of Tekkes took it by escalade early in the nineteenth century.

To defend the Kelat against real soldiers would be a most formidable undertaking, since the length of the "ramparts" cannot be much less than fifty miles. On the other hand, no artillery heavier than field-howitzers could reasonably be brought to bear on the interior, and on account of the absence of adequate maps, aeroplane "spotting" would be most difficult. Hence given equally well-led troops on either side, a defence would probably resolve itself into attempts at surprise assaults, and a series

of hand-to-hand combats in the gorges and defiles of the "gates."

On the flanks of the interior slopes of the northern hills some of the gullies are blocked by the remains of old-time stone-work. These are dams built by Nadir to catch the rainfall in an attempt to form a reserve for a besieged garrison. For a very remarkable reason, that touches on both chemistry and geology, the waters of the little stream, the Ab-i-Kelat, that, entering at the Argavan Shah Gate, bisects the great fortress, are not drinkable. Thus the water-supply question for a large garrison would be very formidable.

Next day the leaden skies poured down torrents, and mists swirled round the peaks, so we were kept to the inside of the Makburra, where the Khan's hospitality and his store of old-time legends and histories of the Kelat kept us vastly interested, whilst we sipped his Turkish coffee, the memory of which runs through succeeding years like the silken strand in Alpine rope.

The following day and the day after the rain continued to fall in a deluge, the clay of the valleys became slippery as soap, and the mountain rivulets swelled into impassable torrents. In the cloud-wrapped hills

we were able to look about and explore the Kelat a little more, though when an insistent message demanded our early return to Meshed, the gorged unfordable rivers kept us back two days more.

When at last we made our muddy way back to the Brigade's "château" in Meshed, we found ourselves suddenly up against a circumstance not only startling from the point of view of Weltpolitik, but most confusing to the unmathematical.

Young Amanulla, the stripling king in Kabul, had decided to cut his milk teeth upon the Government of India. Certain Hebrews, whom we strongly suspected of being the type that devours its young, had egged him on to this rash step.

Quant à nous, we experienced a sort of "Alice-through-the-looking-glass" sensation, because our little army was on the wrong side of Afghanistan altogether. What really worried people, though, was not the fact that we were at war with Afghanistan, but whether we were participating in the fifth, fourth, or third war of that series; and so our adventure into the secret stronghold was soon forgotten in the mental turmoil of the higher arithmetic.

AN OFFENSIVE IN RASKAM

AN OFFENSIVE IN RASKAM.

THE vicissitudes of war had taken —— and myself from a more north-westerly region to Tashkurghan in Sarikol. A party of seven N.C.O.'s and men had been waiting here for us for about a fortnight, and when we arrived at about midday the senior N.C.O., a Punjabi named Ahmad Shah, informed me that he had reliable news that a party of a hundred armed men, including Germans and Turks, had crossed Sarikol from the Russian side, and had been seen at Shindi and Baldir in the gorge of the Tashkurghan River. We paraded in the evening, with four days' rations, accompanied by Captain V—— of the 3rd Turkistan Rifle Regiment, six sabres 6th Orenburg Cossacks, and two Sarikoli interpreters. A pack-horse carried some spare rations and blankets.

Moving after dark to avoid comment, we worked our way down the open valley to

Duldul Hokar Mazar, and there crossed the ford.

The track now entered a precipitous gorge, and the horses were led in the darkness up and down the rough cliffs. Very often the men had to hold on to the animals' tails to help them down the steeper places. It was not till three in the morning that we reached a wretched hut, which is all there is of Shindi.

There was no clue here, and the gorge lower down is impassable for man or beast unless the river be frozen, so, having eaten, and slept five or six hours, we moved on to Baldir and thence up the Wacha River. This valley, though only visited by one European traveller in thirty years, is pleasant and fertile. There are a few scattered fields of barley, trees, and houses. Torbush attains to the dignity of a hamlet, and a goat-track runs from here over the hills to Tashkurghan.

A few miles up is a flat round stone, called a Kurtash, in the centre of the path. It is a local legend that no bad horse can be brought to pass this.

Wacha is quite a large, though scattered, village, in an open valley.

A path goes to Sherbus, lower down on the Tashkurghan River, but it is said to be so

fearful that at one place even the Pamir Tajiks have to be blindfolded and led across by the local men, who seem to be a portion of the "lost" white race of Pokhpu.

No news was to be had at Wacha, though a party of traders, coming from the north over the Yamantars Pass, was questioned, and we pushed out small patrols towards Mariong, Robat, and one or two other places.

At nightfall we all rendezvoused at Wacha, spent the night there, and next morning crossed an *aghri art* or "thieves' pass." The track is passable for laden pack-animals, and leads down to Taghlik Gumbak in Taghdumbash. We returned to Tashkurghan for our kits, leaving the Cossacks watching the Mariong pamir, and next day reached Dafdar.

At this village the Beg, with much show of secrecy, came up after dark with fresh information.

Fifteen mounted armed men had come over the Pisling Pass some days before, and gone through his village in the dark. Their tracks had been seen in the snow of Ili Su. Allowing the baggage to go on to Kanjut, I sent for an officer and six rifles of the Gilgit Scouts from our post up in the valley, just over the Indian border.

The party concentrated at Ili Su to the extent of six rifles of a regular regiment, one jemadar and six rifles of the Hunza Company of the "Scouts," and a Kanjuti merchant as interpreter.

Our kit consisted of the men's marching order and two blankets and a "poshtin" each. We also had 120 pounds of flour and some tea and sugar.

An early start on the 9th November took us up a rough trackless valley to the Ili Su Pass.

A fierce gusty wind brought down a good deal of snow, and since the final pull up is very steep and covered with sheets of ice, we were glad to see the top. I fancy the ponies were still more pleased.

The north side carried still more snow, which showed us the trail in much detail, though it was eight days old. Soon enough we came to a few patches of grass and brushwood. The valley gets rougher and narrower lower down, the hillsides are steep, rough, and bare. Our night's bivouac found us at Mal Jeran, or Itak Uzdi, under some boulders. It snowed during the night, and two villagers of Dafdar contrived to desert with five animals. The next day a very early start soon brought

us into thick jungle: there was only the vestige of a track, and, fortunately, this had not been used for years, so the trail stood out clearly. The scrub was thick enough to make it a hard struggle to get through: one of the ponies lost an eye, torn out by a branch. At Issik Bulak (hot spring) is a hut and a patch of plough, sometimes used in the summer by one or two Tajiks from Sarikol. Here we found some tame yaks, which made up for our lost ponies; and just above was half a broken cup, made in Japan: this told us a lot. Clearly it had been dropped by the pursued. The fracture was new, and the cup was too good to belong to a mere wandering shepherd.

Two hours more fighting through close-knit jungle in the darkness saw us in a glade called Baital Jilga (Mare valley), where we bivouacked, close to roaring fires. The descent, though not very steep, had been vilely rough, with loose shale and sharp boulders scattered everywhere. Next morning, from high up on a steep loose slide, we soon came in sight of the immense clear slope of the north side of the mighty Raskam valley. The Ili Su stream, which we had been following, meets the big river in a flat valley floor of stones

and sand nearly a mile wide. The fording of the river at this point was only just practicable; the yaks and smaller ponies were frankly swimming, and carried a good way down, whilst we ferried the rifles and accoutrements across on the larger beasts.

I felt relieved when everything was safe and on the right bank, though it had taken nearly two hours to cross. The spoor had vanished, and it took several casts to find it again in the sand beyond the stony river-bank.

Following it still, a long but easy ascent took us slanting up the huge smooth hillside for more than 4000 feet to the Kum Dawan, or Tupa Dawan, an easy pass, without snow.

A splendid view unfolded itself: to the south the mighty snow-peaks of Muztagh, Oprang, and Hunza; to the east lay the desolate Karakoram; to the north ridge upon ridge unrecognisable from the map; whilst to the west we looked down into the untrodden gorge of the mysterious Raskam.

The swift stream flows between almost sheer and clean-cut cliffs. They tower straight up 7000 feet from the water.

Even the foot of the slopes is quite impassable—there are a few flat patches of boulders

on the inside of some of the curves; but it is only once in many years that the river is frozen so that any human can reach the upper valley from the villages of the embouchure.

Whilst the men and beasts were getting their wind I took a few bearings with our one and only "compass, prismatic, Mark VII." The way down from here was a steep slide of nearly 45°; at the bottom is a little glade where our prey had spent the night, and we munched our frugal midday meal of flapjacks cooked on flat stones heated on yak-dung (argol) fires. This was the Quotchkor Ravine, its hillsides coming steeply down into a sharp V filled with close thickets through which we carried on our toilsome way. Some two hours on we came, to our great surprise, to a couple of huts where was a loquacious Kirghiz woman, Fatima by name, with a little old silent husband. She told us that our pursued were only five days ahead, and even gave us a very little flour: as we did not know where we were going, or how far the nearest cultivation was, or how many days' rations the enemy were in possession of, this small contribution was most welcome. Moreover, looking into the huts we found a

young and chubby Kirghiz aged about sixteen. He could not explain his presence there, and proclaimed his entire ignorance of all this country, but was eventually induced to accompany us as a guide. His reticence explained itself later. Father was guiding the enemy. Lower down, where the trail led us, the valley opened out a little, and the hills seemed so low that I imagined it was but a few days' journey to the plains of Turkistan. We learnt better later. Suddenly, on the shaly hillside, the trail ended. Casts forward were fruitless, the slopes were impassable to right and left, and the jungle in the valley bottom was very thick. The havildar of the militia suggested that our objective must be lying in the two or three miles of jungle, so this was combed out with the bayonet. We found nothing, till suddenly the regular dafadar came upon the narrow mouth of a side ravine, so filled with scrub and trees that it seemed from a little way off to be unbroken hillside. Up this was the trail. I had taken all precautions against an ambuscade, nor were these relaxed here. It would have paid the enemy very well to have laid out a few of my men in some narrow boulder-strewn gorge. The ravine became a small steep

valley, and well up was a trickle of a spring where we were forced to stop for the sake of the animals, which were now much exhausted. We had lost ground this day owing to the river crossing, the search through the jungle, the doubling back of the trail, and the lack of water higher up the valley. However, we made a very early start, the young Kirghiz still protesting his ignorance of the country.

A long gradual ascent into snow, growing deeper and deeper, led us up a long, desolate, untrodden valley to the pass called Furzanak. This is about 17,500 feet. I took some more bearings from its summit. The descent was very steep into a desolate valley leading apparently to nowhere, though, at about midday, we came to a small patch of grass about the size of a tennis-court. We snatched a meal where the enemy had spent the night, and left us some clues, among which was a dead quail and his little straw cage. This told the nationality of at least some of the party. An abominable ascent, finished in the dusk, of a good 4000 steep and slippery feet, led to the summit of another high snow-bound pass grimly named Yettim Qozi, or the "pass of the last sheep." The new moon

lit our way down to a bleak open upland swept by a bitter wind. No water and no fuel and no grass, so supperless to bed in holes scraped in the snow. The next day the wretched beasts were so weak that they were led, or rather driven, the whole way. My own pony was now so thin that his girth had to be put across his breast; he died later.

The Kandek Pass, from which we could look down into Yettim Qozi, is over 17,000 feet, but easy on the south side. Through deep snow on the north, we came down a breakneck descent to a valley in which was a spring and some grass.

We ate here. The food question was now critical: we had one and a half days' on hand, and no idea where the next lot was coming from, nor any notion as to when or where we could strike cultivation or even a village. Half rations were prescribed from that day. A fortunate shot the day before had secured us a young wild sheep—something of a windfall: he was rent to pieces, scorched over a fire, and devoured inside ten minutes. The next pass, called Pilipert, crossed still in daylight, was one of the most difficult I have ever been over, and the snow cornice on the summit

did not help the ponies. Two died on the descent: this meant a bigger load of blankets and so forth for the survivors. Luckily there was not much flour to be carried. We camped on a summer grazing of the Kirghiz.

Even the round trace where their tent had been and their cold fireplace seemed like civilisation to us.

The Paik Pass was the next morning's work, and the worst of the lot.

The cornice on the top and ice-sheets on the slopes were so desperately severe on the ponies that, unridden as they were, two died on the way down into Kulan Urgi. The men began to show the effects of the cold and short rations, and suffered afresh from old wounds picked up in France, Africa, and Persia. Not a word of complaint did I ever hear; the growing freshness of the trail was a constant source of joy to all ranks, who continually voiced their keenness to press on.

We hoped that the Paik was going to be our last bad pass; seven of them in five days was as much as we wanted.

The valley we had dropped into was quite well-clothed in grass, and where it joined the Kulan Urgi stream there were even trees and tall reedy vegetation. The Jemadar and I

rode on here, since the men's wretched ponies could scarcely stagger, and I wanted to see what sort of country lay ahead of us.

The prospect was distinctly more hopeful; the map seemed less nebulous, and I knew that the valley, if unsurveyed, had been traversed before by a European.

Sure enough a few miles down was a patch of barley and a little hut built in under a cliff. The havildar had caught us up, and we hitched up our horses and went in.

A buxom and apple-cheeked, if coy, Kirghiz wench greeted us, and a little blandishment secured a large bowl of rich yak's milk, followed by some boiled wheat. Though the damsel was distinctly grubby, she took the young officer's fancy, once he had something inside him, and he remarked to me, after he had somewhat brusquely ordered his N.C.O. to get outside, "Abhi mera dil khush hogya" (Now my heart is happy). However, he did not see any means of getting rid of me, so after a pleasant chat with the lady, who told us that our prey was now only three days ahead, I led him gently but firmly away. Two miles down was a hamlet of about five houses, and by nightfall we had billeted ourselves, fed, bought some barley, and re-

quisitioned some ponies for the morrow. There was a little friction about handing over the ponies—not, however, for long. Next day was bright and cheery: stomachs were full, every one had a horse by the time we had gone a few miles down this Kulan Urgi valley, where several animals were loose on the hillsides, and the enemy were not far ahead. I had made up my mind here that they were going straight to Yarkand city over the Sandal Pass, a well-trodden route. It was not to be so, though, for some ten miles on the trail bent sharply to the eastward, up a wide valley shown blank on the map. We followed this, through easy level country, with trees, and higher up a few scattered huts. There was also a mill whence we secured a bag of flour, and later on the men enjoyed the rare treat of helping themselves to other people's horses, leaving their more exhausted beasts in exchange.

Indeed at one place where the valley was an open level plain, the "Hun hunt" developed into a cowboy round-up. At five in the afternoon we reached a village high up in the valley, where there lived the "Yuzbashi" of the tribe of Kirghiz who grazed in those parts. He gave us information and

some milk, and we stopped a couple of hours in his house. Two or three more ponies were forthcoming, and we pushed on at seven, hoping to be at grips in the next two or three days. A couple of hours up a desolate valley led to an equally desolate pass. The climb was long and stiff, through ankle-deep loess dust, in great ruts, where hoofs had worn the track three and four feet down. At midnight I reached the top, and enjoyed a scene of the most weird beauty. To the south and east were ice-bound peaks and virgin snowfields and glaciers as far as the eye could reach, the smallest details showing up clearly in the bright beams of the moon; ahead of us to the north were deep and gloomy gorges, equally unknown, in black shadow. A precipitous path took us down to a spring forming the headwaters of the unmapped Shaksu. At three in the morning we came upon a hamlet called Bulun, also not on the map: we had marched nearly fifteen hours, with halts of only three. Bulun held quite a big population, who were so excited at having seen two batches of strangers in forty-eight hours that they talked all at once at the tops of their voices. We had gained a day, but the villagers' yaks and goats had

spoiled the trail. Since the party we were after had avoided the Sandal Pass, I concluded that they were bound for Karghalik. We pushed on along the beaten track towards Ak Masjid, and had marched for several hours towards a high and steep pass, when it became clear that the villagers of Bulun had lied to us. We had two with us, who confessed that they were not taking us on the path the enemy had followed. They were rapidly induced to regret their duplicity; but it was too late to go back, so I decided to go ahead by what seemed a slightly longer route, which would meet that followed by our friends ahead. During all that day and night we made a nightmare march. Over four great passes, led up to by gloomy gorges, did we have to toil. The first two I never found the names of, but the third and fourth were the Sakrigu and Akkas: these two we traversed in the dark. We found a hamlet in the valley after the first pass, and another in the Pokhpu, just before ascending to the Sakrigu. The whole population was under five.

The gloomy gorges north of the Sakrigu seemed interminable in their ghostly meanderings.

There was no track, and the animals floundered and struggled amongst huge boulders. The cliff-sides towered everywhere sheer up for thousands of feet, and at one turn a titanic excrescence of rock showed up like a perfectly-formed ace of spades. This we took for a good omen, and when we debouched from the eerie canyon at midnight to the desolate valley of the Kalisthan River, whose name signifies the place where a robber was hanged, the men were still cheerful, though we found no grass, fuel, or shelter at midnight. The fourth pass of that day's journey was reported by the liar who accompanied us to be near at hand, and easy. For this reason I decided to push on. It was a weary and thirsty party who reached the top and thumped the untruthful Kirghiz. A wretched and deserted hamlet was reached by four in the morning. We broke in the door of a hut and found some firewood, but no water anywhere. After a few hours' sleep we woke up to find three or four aborigines, who told us that they were British subjects. They also said that there was no water for miles. I gave one of the men a few taels and told him to go towards Bulun, work down the Tiznaf valley, and send information about the pur-

sued, either personally or by deputy, to me, at a big village called Arpat Bulung, which was shown on the map in the debouchure of the river into the plain.

This duty he very willingly undertook and efficiently carried out. Just as we were riding off down the valley a very old pink-faced Kirghiz, evidently a man of some consequence, and from his green turban, a Haji, came round the corner, much surprised to meet an armed party. Before he could ask who we were, I asked him who he was and made him produce his papers, which indicated that he was a "Karaulchi," or head frontier guard, sent out by a mandarin to inspect certain outposts, and with instructions to meet an expected guest. This aroused my suspicions that the mandarin might be in touch with certain Germans, since the "guest" could not have been myself. So I told the Haji that I was the guest that he was to help, and that he was to come along with me and make himself useful. If he had any scruples in the matter, he did not mention them in the face of my thirteen bayonets and the compelling suasion of Sowar Kalbi Mahomed, a youthful ex-bandit from Khorasan, who, in Turki, did most of our parleying.

His speciality was the wheedling of unaccommodating Kirghiz maidens, and many were the stores of rich yak milk that found their way down our throats from the ladies' hiding-places.

The hamlet we had left was called Jibrail, and a few hours on was the small village of Ak Masjid, where the main winter caravan route from the Karakoram joins in.

There was no trace of the sought-for trail here, nor any water, but a woman gave us each a small and very welcome drink out of a big gourd. We had had nothing for sixteen hours.

Kök Yar, a big village with trees and real houses, was reached in the afternoon, after a long march through a desolate valley in a blinding, tearing dust-storm. A pool of green slimy water saved the horses.

Kök Yar was barren of news, so we slept a few hours, supping on welcome melons and mealie-cobs, and went on at midnight. I intended to strike obliquely from the east the line that I felt the enemy must have followed, down the Tiznaf valley into the plain of Turkistan. This necessitated a compass-march in the dark over a low ridge of sandy hills that separate the Kök Yar valley

from that of the Tiznaf, the latter being the lower waters of the combined Shaksu, Pokhpu and Kalisthan streams. We dropped down into Arpat Bulung in broad daylight, and found Persian-speaking British subjects predominating there. They told us that no strange party had been down the valley, and suggested that they had crossed the range separating the valley of Tiznaf and Asgansal, which would lead them into Yarkand. This was hard to believe, since it meant that they had made a circumbendibus round the single easy pass that would have taken them straight down the valley into the old city. It might also imply that they had got wind of our pursuit, and this belief was strengthened by the behaviour of the Bulun villagers. The prospect of catching them did not seem very hopeful, but the men felt certain that we should meet in the open, and prepared for the fight they expected. The fresh mealies and melons had done us all a lot of good, and, spending a few hours to rest in Arpat Bulung, we made an immense march that lasted all the afternoon, all night, and well into the next day. At first this led down the river, forded many times, then across a howling desert, now barren and stony, now

overlaid with heavy sand-drifts. As, towards morning, we approached Khan Langar, a big village on the banks of the Yarkand River, the plain became dotted with hamlets, which had sprung up where the map shows all blank from the little irrigation canals started by an energetic Chinese Tao-Yin.

At Khan Langar we billeted ourselves in the Yuzbashi's big house, but the village was empty of all but women and goîtrous *crétins*, who appeared to be unable to talk sense. The intelligent males had all gone into Karghalik to pay their annual taxes. That evening saw us again on the road, through frequent villages, among trees, and the many channels of the Yarkand River. When darkness fell, it became clear that our goîtrous guide did not know the road, in spite of having his head clumped. The Haji did not pretend to, so we came to a house and knocked on the locked *porte-cochère* of the big courtyard, around which are found the rooms of the inmates. The outside is a blank windowless wall. Much hammering at length aroused a voice, which roughly told us to go away. The old Kirghiz, who was now on the best of terms with us, ordered the door to be opened "in the name of the Chinese Re-

public." The man inside said that we might kill him, but he would not open the door. This made me very suspicious, and enraged the Haji, so we agreed to break the door down. A few minutes' work with rifle butts effected an entrance, and we had the creepy feeling of stepping into an empty stableyard, where we had expected to find a hostile assembly. No one could be found, but at last one of the men climbed a ladder to the flat roof and found a whole family in advanced stages of leprosy. We did not investigate further. A few miles on there lived a Wakhi, a British subject, who willingly got out of bed and showed us the path to Painap. This is on the main cart-road joining Kashgar through Yarkand and Karghalik to Lanchowfu, and so to China itself. An empty sarai gave us a few hours' sleep, and early in the morning we galloped into a walled garden a mile outside the gates of Old Yarkand. I stopped here and sent on my Kanjuti interpreter, in civilian clothes, to fetch out the Aksakal (the British trade agent) without attracting attention. He arrived an hour later; I inquired the whereabouts of a party, supposedly mainly Bajauris, who had arrived in the city, as I guessed, a day or so before,

from Badakshan. He opined that the Badakshi Sarai might hold them; so under his guidance the whole patrol hastened in the growing daylight through the quaint tortuous lanes of the ancient abode of iniquity, to the gate of a large sarai. The inrush of a dozen enthusiastic Pathans, Punjabis, Hazaras, and Kanjutis with fixed bayonets bewildered the fifty or so more or less ruffian Bajauris and Afghans in the sarai, and they put their hands up and surrendered themselves without more ado. It only remained to sort out the fifteen we wanted, search them, and relieve them of their German arms and ammunition. So happily ended a fortnight's venture through an almost untouched region of some of the wildest country that it has ever been my misfortune to cross.

KHŪDU

KHUDU.

THE hard-faced mounted infantry Havildar, who carried the furrows of a Bavarian grenade across his cheek, walked his smart little Arab stallion along the front of the flying column. First a sheepskin-bonneted Kurdish "Dahbashi" made his report, then an upstanding Regular Yusafzai Naik of bombers, after him the bobbed-haired hawk-nosed Khattak commander of the Lewis-gun section, and finally, a slit-eyed, wizen-faced "one-pip" Mongol, who led the couple of score foot levies who formed the bulk of the tiny army.

With a final glance at the dozen raking Khurasan mules, to see that their cargo of ".303 in chargers" was correct and properly loaded, the "vieil moustache" wheeled to his chief, and, cutting away his hand, reported "all present and correct." The Pathan "Wurdi-major" who had, twenty minutes before, been designated to command the

column, clattered on his big Waler mare up the narrow cobbled street of the village to obtain the Major's permission to march off. He found him standing in his shirt-sleeves, a sheaf of signal messages in his hand, with the Captain of the regular infantry company, at the door of the little shanty wherein a solitary British soldier, with the aid of a "D Mark III.," kept the outposts in touch with their main body, nearly 150 miles away, across three ranges of hills.

A moment later a couple of brief words of command brought the motley force up the "High Street." Debouching from the village, whose eastern disorderliness was tinged with a certain raffish south-European flavouring of glazed shop fronts, whitewash, and blue paint, it passed the billet of the regular Pathan and Punjabi N.C.O.'s. They had adorned this with round iron tables and garden chairs set about with a few laboriously tended shrubs, the result of the restaurant habit, acquired in Flanders, that they had transplanted to Khurasan. A few yards farther up, the "shabby genteel" guard of Gendarmerie turned out in their brown-paper accoutrements and tin swords, and paid the appropriate compliments in the

Swedish fashion. Half a mile beyond, the force had climbed gently up a stony glen on to a triangular plateau, perhaps as large as Kensington Gardens, that marked the water parting between the Caspian basin and that of the Sea of Aral. A matchlock shot to the Wurdi-major's right, a couple of "sentry groups" of Regular sepoys looked down a steep slope over a crenelated granite fortalice held by an insanitary Soviet garrison, and out on to the immense plain of Turkistan that stretches northward without a hill to the shore of the Arctic Ocean. In a tiny "Christian" hamlet a mile below, half a dozen recently colonised families of the "Molokan" sect had exchanged the oppression of "Orthodox" Imperial Chenovniks for the tortures, shootings, and pillage of innumerable "Red" commissars. These upholders of liberty and the rights of man divided their business hours between "nationalising" the few bushels of grain the "Molokani" struggled to grow on the stony sun-baked slopes, and squeezing the tatterdemalion Persian donkey-drivers that carried charcoal and firewood across that rugged frontier.

Once on the plateau, at a word from the

Wurdi-major three or four files of the Kurdish horsemen galloped *ventre à terre*, as was their wont, tails, manes, and sheepskin bonnets streaming in the wind, left hand down steadying the butt of the slung long Lee-Metford, to their places to cover the front of the column.

Threading their way between the tiny patches of stunted corn, still green, that covered the stony plateau, the Lewis gunners released certain straps on their pack-saddles, the bombers looked again to their safety-pins and checked their detonators, whilst the section commanders of the infantry made sure that each man's magazine was charged.

The column had been sent out at twenty minutes' notice to relieve an anxious situation and a post of levies cut off by insurgent Kurds.

The Wurdi-major was fully aware of the many difficulties that beset his chief, but he was no unworthy son of that famous Corps whose father, the never-to-be-forgotten Lumsden, chose for his following "men who are not easily taken aback in any emergency"; and behind him were a leavening of men who, refusing to be taken aback in that most deadly of all emergencies that ever threatened

the King's troops, attacked maskless into the gas-cloud and held the German advance on that fatal 26th of April 1915.

The little outpost position was held by two Regular companies, one of young Punjabi infantry, the other of Indians, and the first had arrived but two hours before. Thirty miles along the metalled motor road to the north, a whole Bolshevik division, with quick-firing artillery, aeroplanes, and armoured cars, threatened the little post, and awaited the opening that their "political department" had worked to create. It was this opening that the Wurdi-major was deputed to close. For some weeks past the Soviet had cultivated the acquaintance of a certain Khuda Verdi Sardar, a petty Kurdish chief, who had been the Macheath of those parts, even to the collecting of seventeen wives, wenches, and what-nots, some not uncomely. The advent of our troops had caused a depressing dulness in the bandit industry, and Khudu, as he was familiarly called, listened readily to the wooings of Comrade Paskutski. And Comrade Paskutski sweetened his promises by the despatch, by smugglers' paths, of several hundred magazine rifles and a dozen machine-guns to Khudu's ancestral château

that topped an inaccessible crag in the recesses of the Aleh Dagh.

Three days before, rendered pot-valiant by all these weapons, and by the impassioned orations of Bolshevik and Pan-Turk orators, Khudu had allowed his revolt to blaze out. The spark that kindled the tinder was indeed the uninvited butting-in of the ubiquitous young British subaltern to the scene of a gun-running. In a few hours every one of Khudu's ragged adherents that owned a Russian "Trokh-linie" ("3-line") rifle, or a "Territorial" Lee-Enfield, was on his little shaggy stallion in the tail of his chief. The first casualty was the British subaltern, but points were soon notched against the home team. Meanwhile, riding boldly but warily through the hostile valleys, the three or four patrols of our Kurdish levies, under their regular Pathan and Punjabi instructors, that had watched the 160 miles of wild rocky frontier through the snows and blizzards of the past winter, concentrated at the clump of hamlets that nestled in the border valley of Jiristan.

Jiristan, twenty-two toilsome rocky miles away, was now the Wurdi-major's objective, for it had at once been invested by some

400 of the insurgents, not before a reinforcement of a further half-squadron of our own Kurdish levies had reached it, plus the doubtful accretion of a company of Regular (save the mark !) Persian infantry.

The whole lot had now been invested for four days by several times their number of insurgents, and their scanty stock of ammunition had begun to run low. Even the most dull-witted understood that the revolt had been organised by the Bolsheviks to draw off some of the Regular infantry from the outposts, and so leave the only wheel road that led into Khurasan open for their armoured cars and lorries full of troops.

The Regulars were accordingly prohibited from partaking in any move to relieve Jiristan, or to carry ammunition to its garrison.

Still the ammunition question was urgent, and so on the third day a half-dozen Kurd levies took out three or four mules under the leadership of an impetuous young lance-dafadar, an Awan from the Punjab Salt Range, a tribe, incidentally, that had a percentage of its voluntarily enlisted young men killed in the war larger than that of any county in England.

This rash youth decided to bullock his way

through the first defile, and had all his men hit in a few minutes by accurate rifle-fire at the closest of ranges. It was a wounded man from his party that brought the report that led to the despatch of the Wurdi-major's little column, in order to clear matters up, and here we return to follow its fortunes.

Arrived at the far end of the plateau, the leading files scrambled down 200 feet of declivity into the rough valley of Bardar, through which a mule-track ran up, over a pass of 7000 feet, and down the other side straight to the objective. The valley floor was still wide enough for the mounted men to remain out watching the flanks, which the Wurdi-major made good before committing his main body into the narrow defiles. The sun was already dipping towards the Caspian when the column and its mules filed past the fourth-class frontier customs house, in which a dilapidated, down-at-heels Persian prince kept innumerable accounts and filled up countless forms in excellent, if bureaucratic, French. The young nobleman was on his doorstep under the faded "Lion and Sun." A pleasant smile on his engaging countenance and his fulsome salutations greeted the column. No doubt he was

heartily glad to see threescore tough and nubbly, if thick-headed, bayonets that would get his land out of the mess that it was embroiled in. "What warriors we Persians would be were there no killing in the matter."

A couple of miles beyond the village the valley began to narrow in. The lower slopes, though grass-covered, were too steep for even the cat-like Kurdish ponies, whilst above them sprang rocky scarps that approached the perpendicular. Spread over the lower slopes was a tangle of birch and dwarf cedar, liberally streaked with boulders and precipitous side-valleys. The mountain wall to the right of the column's advance towered up in bare yellow cliffs to 10,000 feet, dividing the valley from Russian territory, and crossed by many toilsome smugglers' tracks that debouched into labyrinthine side-valleys opening on to the line of march. On the other flank a sheer wall of black granite leapt stark and unbroken to nearly 11,000 feet, and over a shoulder of this a goat-track led straight down into the valley of Ogaz, the hotbed of all the revolting factions, a wild domain dotted with towers and fortified villages. One of these was Khudu's battle headquarters, awkwardly situated on the

flank of the relieving force, and it was in this that Khudu was reported to have a couple of Schneider-Danglis Q.-F. mountain guns, a present from his Soviet friends.

It now became necessary to use little piquets of foot-soldiers to guard the flanks from surprise, and, as every frontier soldier knows, this is a slow and toilsome business. A couple of miles above the village, however, the leading files came upon the lance-dafadar of the day before, and three or four of his men, ensconced behind boulders, and a moment later a brisk fusilade announced that touch had been obtained with the enemy. The cracking of high-velocity bullets on the rocks kept things merry for a few minutes until the main body arrived, when a short burst of fire from it induced the enemy to keep their heads down.

In a few minutes arrangements were made for the wounded to be slung across some spare mules and started off on their way back to headquarters. An old Kurd, the most serious case, had been hit in seven places, and commented on the fact in lurid Kurdish phrases for ten minutes without repeating himself. One bullet had come in at one side of his head and out at the other.

As he had nothing of consequence inside it, perhaps he had little to grumble about. As for being slung across a mule, not having seen the comfortable cantilever-sprung Sunbeam ambulances of the western front, he did not remark on their absence.

The lance-dafadar summed up the situation in a few words, and made it clear that both sides of the gorge-like valley, fourteen miles long, were lined with sangars, for most of the way at least, and that these were held by two or three hundred Kurds with ample ammunition.

Here was a brand-new tactical problem to solve. Had the enemy been Mahsuds or Mohmands, a brigade would scarcely have sufficed for the job, which might well have taken a week to complete. Though the Kurd was an unknown quantity as a fighter, the Wurdi-major had made a pretty shrewd guess at his worth, and of the value of discipline and training. Piquetting on standard frontier lines was clearly impracticable, both from lack of men and of time. So he devised a new plan. Sending his Lewis gun, with a small escort of riflemen, up 200 feet to the top of a small knoll on his left, he gave the Khattak boy that commanded it certain

instructions. According to plan, then, the Lewis gun got into action, fired a short burst or two at the flashes of the rifles obliquely across the valley. The Kurds scuttled away from the unpleasant novelty, and the column, its front line extended as much as the valley would allow, advanced from spur to spur and from knoll to knoll, until a fresh rattle of fire from the enemy showed that he had collected for a stand again. Then the Lewis gunners clambered forward, and coming into action again on the other side of the valley, cleared the enemy's sangars once more. So the process was repeated all through the long July evening until night fell, and the panting, sweat-drenched men slept where they lay under cover of the tumbled boulders of the pass. Sentries kept their watch on the enemy, dotted about the hillsides 100 yards or so away, who sometimes disclosed their position by the flash of a rifle and the loud double crack of the Russian 3-line or the duller bang of the old "Berdanka" with its leaden ball. Now and again a chance bullet, glancing off the top of a rounded boulder, would soar up into the air with the noise of a great bumble-bee.

The goat-track that led from this valley

over the shoulder of Ak Kamar was a source of anxiety to the Wurdi-major, who knew that Khudu, if apprised of what was happening, could bring over 200 rifles from Ogaz against the rear of the column. To guard against this, a small party was left to watch this approach, and it had been arranged to support it from the main outpost headquarters.

Nights are short in July, and before three in the morning it was clear enough to see and to shoot. The first spears of light from the east were the signal for a burst of rifle-fire from the insurgents, and a minute later the sturdy infantry, stalwart Yusafzais, impetuous Khattaks, and stocky Mongols, were clambering and sweating up over the tumbled slopes of the pass. Their bayonets twinkled in the morning sun, and now and again some man took a quick snap-shot at a retreating sheepskin bonnet as it showed amongst the mountain birch and the juniper, the Lewis gun rattled out a few disconcerting rounds, or a bomber crawled up to a sangar wall, Mills bomb in hand and bayonet man at his side. The Kurd had no stomach either for the bomb or the bayonet, and the deafening crack of the Lewis bullets splashing on the rocks soon harried him out of his defences.

The "vieil moustache," the Yusafzai Havildar, the veteran of Neuve Chapelle, of Second Ypres, of Festubert, and of Loos, led the bombers, and his unswerving and unhesitating *entrain* carried all before him, transforming the hastily improvised half-trained levies into the semblance of regular frontier infantry by the magic of his example. The Havildar was none of your supply-dump soldiers or air-raid heroes: he had spent nearly seven years in five theatres of war in a platoon of front-line infantry. The scars of bomb, shrapnel, and of machine-gun bullet were his very visible testimonials.

Now less than a mile—a very rugged mile it is true—to the Wurdi-major's right, scarcely half an hour's scramble for trained hill soldiers, was the Russian frontier.

A few miles away, down the north slopes of Gulul Dagh, the frontier ridge, in the fair "valley of turquoises," lay the little hill-station where, in Imperial times, the fair of Turkistan, pursued by the local hill-captains, were wont to escape the torrid heat of the Akhal plain. Here some 3000 ragged warriors, the depraved, diseased, and degenerate offspring of conquering Seljuk Hordes, had been conscripted by the plotting Soviet, and awaited

an opportunity to intervene to Khudu's aid, as the Wurdi-major well knew. Swashbuckling, looting, dissolute riff-raff though they were, they were armed to the teeth with machine and modern Q.-F. mountain guns, had Nieuport and Sopwith aeroplanes within easy call, were animated not only by fanaticism, but by a thirst for plunder in the yet fat valleys of Khurasan, and were led by a good soldier. A Captain in the Osmanli regular army, a gunner, he had been educated in Paris, spoke several languages, knew his work, and was imbued with a genuine and admirable patriotism for a greater Turkey. In a word, a man to be reckoned with.

In the early afternoon our little column, plunged as it was between much more numerous forces of the enemy, found itself still on the wrong side of the pass, and 1000 feet or so down from the summit, where a little spring of crystal water bubbled amongst the pine-trees out from a glinting black rock face. Here the weary men halted for a while, and munching the barley flap-jacks they had crammed into their haversacks the evening before, washed the meal down with the harmless fluid. If the fat sheep of a near-by Kurdish hamlet did happen to be browsing

on the succulent patches of alpine pasture, the small sheep-skinned youth who herded them had certainly scuttled home from the noise of the firing. In any case neither regulars nor levies were vegetarians, or had they any tradition of dry-nursing, or of "waiting for the (A.S.C.) waggon," or of "indents in quadruplicate" to be handed in to fat and impertinent commissariat sergeants. The Wurdi-major's war diary is silent on the subject of mutton, nor is he himself prejudiced in favour of leaving anywhere empty-handed, or of indulging in complicated departmental transactions.

The top of the pass was the scene of a more determined stand by the enemy, and four miles beyond lay the little hamlet of Namanlu, embowered in tufted poplars and girdled by tiny terraced stone-walled fields, as it might be the Alpes Maritimes. This was the headquarters of the insurgents who laid siege to Jiristan, and from it a mule-track branched to the south to the valley of Ogaz, by which Khudu brought up his reinforcements. It was nearly midnight by the time the defence melted away before the advance of a line of bayonets, covered yet again by the accurately laid Lewis.

The night was passed scrambling down the slopes hunting Kurds out from crannies of rock, and early dawn found the column face to face with the defensive nest formed by the stone walls and loopholed buildings of Namanlu. Luck favoured the attack. The Khattak child who commanded the Lewis gun judged a range of fully 800 yards to a nicety, and a single burst killed no fewer than seven Kurds, leading personalities, and the backbone of the defence. The rest had no stomach to meet the rush of bayoneteers and bombers that cleared Namanlu, and in a few moments the mounted men, doubling to their ponies, galloped over the flat valley-floor to join hands with the besieged, and, incidentally, to rescue a couple of hapless Polish refugees, man and wife, who had exchanged the Bolshevik frying-pan for the Kurd fire. Before the sun was well up, no sign remained of the fighting but the flames and smoke rising from the thatch of Namanlu, that had caught fire in the scuffle, and a neat row of Kurdish corpses laid out along the front of Jiristan customs post.

The revolt melted away in a day or two, and various young Khans of the Kurds came in to explain naïvely how they had been

led astray by the horrid little man Khudu. They further requested that the British should not allow the Persian administration to wreak their vengeance on them. Though the Persian official of to-day seldom succeeds in bringing to heel any contumacious ruffian with arms in his hands, he is excellent at torturing and starving any such that may fall into his clutches.

Poor Khudu fled south across the hills to his ancestral castle, there to receive a message from the General Staff of the 1st Red Army to the effect that they were dissatisfied with the results of his operations, and would he kindly return the money and arms that had been lent to him. Then, to cap all, he, with the last handful that remained of the several hundred men that a few days before had followed his standard, was beleaguered in his castle. A motley assemblage of Imperial Persian artillery and infantry, mixed with a Chu-chin-chow chorus of tribal levies, Kurds not "agin the Government," Timuris from the Afghan border, Hazaras and Jamshedis, all on little wild squealing stallions, dressed in long full-skirted frock-coats, and armed with every imaginable sort of rifle—Lebel carbines, Turkish Mausers, Werndls, Berdans,

Gulf-Martinis, Remingtons, and, above all, Russian "3-line,"—sat down, studiously out of shot, around the stronghold, and grazed their beasts on the green corn of the wretched villagers.

Great hopes were centred in the artillery. However, though ten years before the excellent little mountain guns of St Chamond may have been the *dernier mot*, yet a decade of neglect and brutish ignorance from a gold-laced colonel of artillery did not improve them as weapons. So, as the Imperial Persian gunners flatly declined to go within rifle-shot of the fortalice, and their corroded guns could not range as far as the modern rifles of Khudu's men, something of a stalemate resulted. The situation was saved by the garrison running short of water. Khudu seized an opportunity to slip through the cordon and get into Russian territory.

The next day his younger brother Allah Verdi was in chains, and the seventeen comely wives, wenches, and what-nots, loaded into a four-horse waggon, were being escorted in the direction of some one else's "Andarun."

SCYTHIANS AND SARACENS

SCYTHIANS AND SARACENS.

THERE was a crunching and champing. Now and again, through the steam that rose up from crowded dishes, I could see a broad-shouldered blue-eyed figure in a chain-mail shirt hurl a gnawed ham-bone to a wolf-hound, whose long and very white teeth shut with a clash on their prize. Young squires in bobbed hair and curly-pointed shoes snapped and squabbled over the carrying in of roasted hills of meat. Horn and wooden wine-jack clattered on the bare oaken tables under the fists of two surcoated and spade-bearded knights, who discussed the proper equipment of "Turcopoles," the correct combination of arbalestiers with mounted men in mail, and the deplorable tendencies of Hospitaller and Templar, with a heat that would be quite out of place in a Camberley or a Quetta.

I seemed to see the dainty shoulders of the lovely Anna Comnena go up in a little "frisson" of horror as Sir Geoffrey or Sir Fulke ejects unwanted carp-bones on to the rush-strewn floor.

Overhead there gleamed a row of painted blazons, fesses and barres, martlets, chevrons and roses, in azure, gules, argent, and or, the charges of gallant Nordic gentlemen who had supped in that dark oaken hall, and of many who, no doubt, had left their bones in the county of Tripoli, the desert sands of Moab, and the ridges over against Tiberias.

A great pup, standing thirty inches high at the withers, pulled himself howling out of a corner from what had now become a full-dress dog-fight, and, plaintively placing his jowl on the floor and one great feathery paw over a torn eyelid, clearly showed that he no longer desired to be considered a candidate for that particular bone.

The growls and bayings swelled into an even roar . . .

"M'sieur, prendra du vin blanc ou du vin rouge?" said an even voice from a blue-jowled black-jacketed figure at my elbow, whose toes were concealed by a heel-long white apron of surpassing cylindricality.

I woke up to select the traditional "Vin blanc" of His Majesty's Land Forces, and to realise that it was something typically Gallic with six cylinders, a high compression, and no appreciable silencer, that outside in the courtyard, had counterfeited the dog-fight.

The row of painted coats of arms remained, though, on the smoke-stained panelling under the galleries of the dining-hall of the nine-hundred-year-old Tête de Bœuf in Abbeville. As I saw a leg in "Garance" projecting from a screen, and again the orange gorget patches of "l'Aviation française," I felt that here was a modern man-at-arms who reflected on the doings of his Nordic forbears, who had supped under the curved black beams. Pictures formed themselves of high-pooped, clumsily rigged merchantmen warping themselves down the sedgy estuary of the Somme, the while profane mariners implored mailed knights and leather-jerkined *gens d'armes*, for the sake of our lady, to go and lose themselves. Very likely it was some skipper of a cog, when his narrow decks were overcrowded by the armoured military element, who was inspired to coin the word "lobster" as a term of reproach towards

the junior service. His descendant, the conservative turret sight-setter of a 15-inch gun-house, sees no reason to alter it.

It was a long weary journey in those days coasting round to Byzantium in a leewardly pink, to be welcomed or not, as the case might be, by a fair diarist born in the purple, according to whether one happened to be a mannerly Godefroi de Bouillon from the Ardennes, or a rude rough soldier from the East Riding.

Those who fell short of Godefroi's standard of polish found no doubt congenial pot companions of their own race in the Farangian Guard. From Byzantium, week after week of torrid marches through Cilicia and Paphlagonia and the uncharted and rugged wilds of the Taurus lay ahead, before the Frank could hope to set eyes on the counties of Edessa or of Tripoli. Think on that you that complain querulously about not having had a "gridded" and contoured twenty-thousand map of the Gallipoli Peninsula.

In spite of the impartial Boha-ed-din and the more prejudiced William of Mangis, there are few items of history about which the world of to-day is more misinformed than of the Crusades.

Oblivious of Seljuk, Othmanli, and of Mongol, the poor readers of the propaganda press have a fuddle-headed notion that Saracen means Turk. Even the Nautical Almanac, justifying the pure mathematician's condemnation of it, as making a too hysterical appeal to the emotions, supports this weird idea, in its quiet way, on a fly-leaf.

How difficult is it, then, for the modern slave of the "Hoe" to convince himself that that Saleh-ed-din, and his brother Zia-ud-din, were of the Nordic race, and pure at that. Pure, since the Kurd had not in the twelfth century suffered that mixing of Mongol blood that has altered the skull-shapes of some at least of the more Eastern tribes—the Zafaranlu, the Zeinadillu, the Chapashlu, and Topkanlu.

The shades of these two gallant gentlemen must writhe with horror at the thought of being patronised by a Dravidian history writer of 1921. This fact, ignored by historians, accounts for many a strange happening in the 'Annus Mirabilis,' 1241. In that year, which decided the future of the race that even yet sways the world, Tamerlane's men rode into Silesia (note for Prime Ministers: not to be confused with Cilicia),

only to be held back from the west at Wahlstatt by a "contemptible" army of Nordics. In that self-same year Khiva awoke from its many centuries of sleep, and a great Mongoloid army of "Chorasmians," uniformed, organised, and disciplined, swept south-westwards, despoiling the great cities of Iraq, blotting out the remnants of their Akkadian Nordic and Sumerian Semitic civilisations. It came on in a deluge of blood through Palestine to Egypt, and to the sack of Cairo.

Saracen and Frank in 1241 joined hands, sans phrase, and fought shoulder to shoulder against the alien race. Neither common interest nor diplomatic bargainings can explain this geste: there is an unconscious, or subconscious, kinship of race that has bound Nordic to Nordic against Mongol or against Dravidian right through history. In 1857 the pampered semi-Dravidian regiments of Hindustan foreswore their oaths, and relapsed into bloodstained baboonery. Then not only did Pathan and Punjabi form their battalions and march to the Delhi trenches, but the blue-eyed wild men of the hills, of No Man's Land, came down to Lawrence offering to hold the frontier forts, left empty by the faithless men of Hind. In those days

Nordic men ruled Hind and the Punjab, and Lawrence placed a trust in the unkempt Nordic levies that the upshot justified.

When Attila's Mongols invented stirrups, so that he was able to manœuvre six hundred thousand mounted men against the precariously barebacked "equites" of declining Rome, his armies overwhelmed the Wends, a race of "Homo Alpinus," and jack-booted Mongol troopers impressed their stamp on the aboriginal Wendish women of Prussia, a land that they ruled for six long centuries.

Six more centuries could not efface it, nor will sixty more; the Prussian will be a hybrid Mongol till the end of time, thinking Mongol thoughts, and remaining ill-conditioned as the cross-bred. In 1914 four Mongoloid races had prepared a secret destruction against the Westerns.

The Magyar and the Bulgar, who are real Mongoloids, were ready enough tools to the hand of the Prussian. Though as ready to massacre Aryans as these would be to exterminate "Homo Xanthus," they have been free from the ill-nature of the hybrid.

The Turk, again, saw eye to oblique eye with the Pruss, though the upper-class Othmanli has mixed his blood, and lengthened

his Brachykephalic skull, by many a cross with Caucasian lasses.

When the pinchbeck Attila came again to the rolling country of Châlons, to the Marne, where Roderick and Aëtius and their following of wild Nordic levies had held the gate of the West sixteen hundred years before, Nordic blood ran warmer in many a distant land. Blue-eyed Yusafzai lads and eagle-beaked Awans remembered their race, and their forbears, the "green-eyed devils," that put the fear of Thor, Bhogwan, and Odin into the Chinese. Many a thousand clumsy left thumbs thrust inky on to an attestation form.

In due course, horse and foot rode and marched to Orleans, into the valley of the Loire, the river that twelve centuries before had seen another impetuous army from the East riding under the glint of their scarlet-tufted lance-points to the stricken fields of Tours and Poictiers.

. . . . . .

Next morning my pilgrimage took me past the sign of "La belle Indienne," that commemorates in the engaging Gallic way the long months and years that the thin-lipped flat-backed horsemen of the Punjab and of Rajasthan spent in their midst.

It is a far cry from those "frore Caspian reed-beds, the Aralian estuaries, and the drear Chorasmian waste," the immensities of the steppes of Turgai, and the green downs of Ural that form the first home of the Nordic warrior, and nearly four thousand years had to pass before blue-eyed Pathan would march into Normandy and into Artois to press a trigger side by side with blue-eyed Normand against the "square heads" of Pomerania and Westphalia.

Very few of either dreamed of their common source near faery Orenburg, whose domes glint gold over enchanted slender towers of shell-pink, palest blue, and the green of sprouting corn, to the eyes of the traveller at dawn, coming in from Tashkand and the arid "famine steppes" to the southwards.

The iron sword of the Nordic, the stirrups of Attila, the long bow of Yew that "Homo Mediterraneus" devised to get over the sogginess that the Central Asian bow of horn acquired in damp seaboard lands—these were amongst the very few warlike inventions that marked the rise of neolithic man. Even at the expense of discouraging the Royal Commission on Awards to Inventors, one must own that neither have there been

very few genuine inventions of war since Cressy.

English kings seem to have quite a habit of introducing new forms of war material into the valley of the Somme. The road led past Wadicourt and the Vallée des Clercs that five and a half centuries before had heard the harsh cough of King Edward's "gonnes." A few score kilometres up that same blood-soaked reedy valley, on a not-to-be-forgotten day, there wallowed and rumbled through Flers two tanks.

"Rufus'" little engine hummed as we sped along a fair road of macadam towards Doullens. He was called "Rufus" because he had done away with the transportation problem. Doullens seethed with the rush of a market day, and we sat down to hearty meal between huge-shouldered red-moustached Norman graziers clothed in the Scythian smock, sewn across back and chest in the old Nordic patterns as it might be, of Fair Island or a valley of the Northern Yusafzai.

At Doullens, besides that little garden which was the scene of an allied victory, I saw the first of endless string of cemeteries, a rough little wire-fenced plot under the bank of the railway.

Australia has carved out a niche for herself in the motor industry of Doullens, and with a tank filled by Australian hands, to a cheery Australian "so long," Rufus breasted the slope up on to the more open treeless country and the road to Albert. Here was British ground: names that have already taken the ring of history and the glamour of great deeds; names that jostle in a man's brain with the drum-roll of Ramillies and Minden, Salamanca and Sobraon, Cadzand, Ahmad Khel, and Malplaquet.

Albert lies in ruins, its gallant townsfolk living in huts and sheds and in cellars, working, as they worked without doubt and without pause, through the four years of the war. The four years of their struggle has lengthened into seven, whilst the overling haggles and chaffers over "reparations."

You may talk lightly about reparations in Westminster, especially if you come of a pre-Nordic race celebrated for its percentage of indispensables and its capacity for living unscratched through wars, but no decent man can be anything but wholeheartedly on the side of the French who has seen the blasted valley of the Somme to-day.

It was on to a crest of one of the rolling

ridges between Albert and Péronne that I climbed on the evening of that day. I looked all around the level horizon from the sunset in the leaden sky, to the north, to the east, and back again. I saw no tree, no house, no growing crop, and no work of man's hand, save here and there a great shapeless horrid pile of tangled rusty wire that seemed crusted and gorged with men's blood.

Away in the remoteness of Scythia and of Bactria one may look upon such scenes, where heaven, for man's wickedness, has wiped the round disc of a man's horizon clean of all man's work.

In those Asian foothills drought and the drying up of every fount and source of water, and of the very clouds themselves, has been the avenging instrument; in the land of France a cleansing of these sickly yellow crystals has fined the gold in the fire of the searing detonations of trotyl.

There was nothing of smooth, manipulated, schooled Europe. The survivors of the new "Scourge of God" lived in hovels and in burrows in the tossed soil that made a man think of the hidden lairs of jackals. Amongst them, thinly disguised in tweed cap and corduroy trousers, an occasional British soldier,

speaking a French of his own, held by the kindly Picards as more than a compatriot, even as one blood kin to the very soil, tended the graves of his comrades, and was ready enough for a chat with another of the "brown brotherhood."

That night we slept in old Péronne, in the "Sainte Claude," which just manages to keep a roof over its head, patching its many shell-holes and the old familiar furrows of steel fragments on stone, with match-boarding and "tôle ondulée."

Péronne brought back the East again. In all that tumbled ruin of white shattered stone and powdered red brick there still rose the outlines of the round towers of her ancient castle, the inner and the outer bailey, the flanking loopholes and the double line of defence modelled on Château Gaillard. This was the hold that Richard built from the lessons he learned in Palestine and from the great castle of Kerak-des-Chevaliers in Moab, fought over again six hundred years after by Frank and Saracen.

More than this, in a little cemetery on the high-road out of Péronne lie the bones of a handful of Awans and Tiwanas who rode out under their red-and-white pennons from

the rugged valleys of the Salt Range to handle the Vickers and Hotchkiss that devoted Englishwomen's fingers made to keep France clean of yellow blood.

Lest they forget, the good people of Péronne still keep the great hoardings of that ill-omened colour which announced that Péronne was an "Hauptbahnhof." As I turned north-eastwards next morning to find Gouzeaucourt, a long-limbed loose-jointed figure, blue-eyed and tow-haired, pick and straight-hafted spade on shoulder, appeared from a structure of old doors, railway-sleepers, and corrugated-iron, that seemed to do duty as an estaminet. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and explained that he too was bound for Gouzeaucourt. When he added that he had belonged to the —iéme de chasseurs à pied, no further introduction was needed; the anchor was weighed, and a course shaped in company at economical cruising speed over the rolling ridges of the typical Somme country that undulated to the north and eastwards.

It was not long before I was offered three guesses as to what won the war. Suggestion of Americans, Tanks, and Petrol were met with a polite but withering scorn. Even a

modest putting forward of the Judaic claim received but very short consideration.

What Jean Baptiste plumped for was "le pinard." In fact he was still taking precautions on the same lines to counteract the danger of losing the peace.

When I painted a little word-picture of that nectar of molasses which, in pride of place at the head of the ration-party and labelled SRD (Soldiers' Real Drink), brought the goodwill of the sailorman to the trench-rat's heart, and a cosy feeling to his little Mary, the chasseur's eye moistened. Then for an instant he seemed bitter against the luxuries that Atkins enjoyed over Dumanet. The feeling left him as quickly as it came, and he announced that the British were "Chic types" on the whole, and that they could not really help their politicians.

Here followed an antistrophe on the subject of "hommes de politique," in which the word "Merde" occurred with considerable frequency. By this time we had come swiftly down into the sunlit green saucer that held what had been Tincourt-Boucly. There is a big cemetery here, bright, well-ordered, and good to look upon. In it there are graves that brought to mind the attack

of cavalry with tanks of December 1917, that saw our unassuming Punjabi jawans again at the point of the spear-head and nearest to Cambrai.

Cemetery followed upon cemetery—cemeteries large and cemeteries small, cemeteries tidy and cemeteries rough, cemeteries bright and cemeteries grey; graves of Saxon and of Norman, of Breton and of Wurtemburger, of Highlander and of Pomeranian, of "See-Soldat" and of "Crystal Palace Sailor," of Sowar and of Tirailleur, of gunner and of "Flieger"; white-painted crosses and brown creosote, grey pillars over Prussian officers; here and there a newly set-up row of freshly-cut British headstones, regimental badge cut deep in each.

The day drew on. We chatted for a few minutes with a caravan-load of British "Graves Commission" men, gardeners and their foremen, just tackling a fresh cemetery, and then away northwards again. Jean Baptiste first unearthed an aunt of his in a shack among the ruins of what had been the village of Bertincourt.

The old lady received him with a hearty clout on the side of the head, and five minutes'

expression of disapproval of his manners, morals, and general behaviour.

Her periods were punctuated by glasses of beer, for which the nephew found a kind home, and which appeared to counteract the effects of the *'επεα πτεροεντα* pretty accurately.

The offensive died away as quickly as it had been launched; the old dame knew just about what sort of result it was likely to achieve, from many previous trials.

It took perhaps a gallon of beer to get Jean Baptiste away, and the drinking of many healths. He felt himself bound to deal with each of the allied and associated Powers separately. He missed two, though, and a neutral, since he objected strongly to their unskilled labour flocking into France to take the bread out of Frenchmen's mouths.

It was hardly four when we stopped at another cluster of wooden huts amongst tumbled ruins, which was Bapaume. A couple of bidons of essence gurgled themselves empty, under the hands of a polite and friendly cycle-seller, and we bumped along over execrable pavé, cultivation and tilled fields on either hand, a pleasant sight after many score miles of devastation, or

of tiny patches of crop, pitiful to look on as they struggled for space between immense dumps of wire, or against the throttling by seas of rank and foul weeds.

Arras, though sorely scarred, has still the shape and bustle of a town. It was late when we came in over the railway, and Jean Baptiste sighted a Bistrot of his acquaintance broad on the starboard bow. He clambered out here, as he proposed to billet himself on the tavern-keeper, and to look for a job of work in the morning. There was a friendly look in his truculent blue eyes as his great paw closed on mine. I drove with my left hand for the next few kilometres. It was a bitter thought that of an upstanding clean-run youth, the very type of the Nordic, with five years of murderous infantry campaigning behind him, now reduced to be the pawn of the low-browed politician of a lesser breed, and depend for a hard livelihood on pick and shovel. A youth stamped in the mould of the masterful princes and leaders of the great days of the Frank, whose ancestors by push of spear and honest cut and thrust spread over four-fifths of the world the cleanest rule it has ever had. It is a cynical consolation that it has been the very virtues

of the Nordic race which dealt it the most crippling blows. That unthinking unswerving lust for self-immolation took the great columns of marching men half-way to their extermination in the first critical twenty months, so that the reeling, scarred, battered survivors might be tricked and hypnotised from their heritage by the spates of smooth-tongued cozening talk from the coarse-lipped mouths of Firbolg and of Dravidian, of Cymru and of Yid, of Xanthoid and of Vaishya.

The cloud was lifted a little by the glorious memory, as I passed them, of Souchez, the Labyrinth, Zouave Valley, and Notre Dame de Lorette. Those places had seemed far off indeed in those bloody days of May 1915, when the forlorn hopes of Festubert and Richebourg heard the drumming roar of their seventy-fives, so far that no man hoped to live long enough to see them.

Nœux-les-Mines made a strange sight: few people in an ordinary generation could hope to set eyes on a clean mining town—clean red-tiled roofs and white, really and truly white walls of cottage and factory, and tall white chimney-shafts. In the mining area of Béthune, as might have been expected, all the houses have been rebuilt and the colliery

buildings, so that the miners might as soon as possible get to work on the hewing of coal for France and her rebirth.

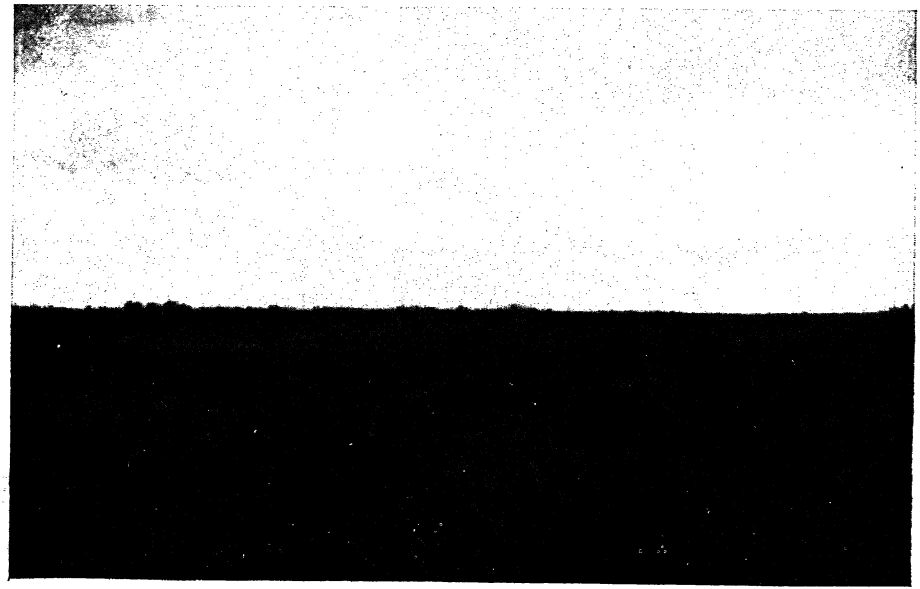
Very sorrowful was it to reach Gorre and Cuinchy and Béthune, and to read on their pathetically scattered and irregular graves the names of those gallant gentlemen who were the first harvest of Azrael.

Could those who buried them, in corners of village churchyards, have imagined the countless graves and their tens of thousands of acres that the Reaper would call for ere his hand was stayed ?

North and east of Béthune lie those ill-omened villages whose defence was to tear the very hearts out of the *débonair* battalions of the Punjab and of the Frontier.

Dotted amongst the fangs of ruined gables and the rank growth of Givenchy, Festubert, and Fromelles are many graveyards. Here and there a few rows of spick and span crosses over Lusitanian soldados, but many thousands are nameless and shabby. Nowhere on the whole front are there such countless unknown graves as here, whose dead are mourned six thousand miles away in rugged Scythian hills.

The gloom was lifted when I met again the



FESTUBERT.

good-hearted peasants who had lived in our old billets six and seven years before.

When our old chief wrote that his army corps had more enemies behind it than before it, and when the jawan's malignant enemies in Hindustan took their spite of him as he stood in the thin line before La Bassée, it was those same staunch peasants that made him and his officer feel that not every man's hand was against them.

Here was that very welcome friendship again. It was a friendship that had knowledge. It knew who were the men who drove back the invader, and of whom one man in every six left his bones in the driving. It knew who were "les races les plus fins" who drove the safe pen and built up as safe fortunes.

If St Stephen's could only learn what these poor peasants knew, it might be well worth four hundred a year.

It might save the sons and brothers of those dead Punjabi fighting men from thinking that once-trusted sahib had betrayed them, bound, to their exploiters.

There was little time in which to linger over ruined Bailleul; Hazebrouck, beloved of the dragoon; or happy Armentières, over

which profound peace reigned during those stormy years. Was it not there that Saxon faced Saxon, and both cursed the Pruss ?

The way ran north to Warneton of ill memory, and a foot deep in muddy ruts from there the track to Ypres. It gave one a queer feeling to approach the Menin Road and Hell Fire Corner from the east.

Belgium was very different from France. That road of horror was now a magnificent concrete causeway, level like glass, many yards wide, and flanked with cheerful new homesteads. To either hand still floundered, drunkenly, in the pathless mud of the craters, the corpses of tanks.

As we drove through that battered gate of Menin droves of sinister-faced workmen flocked out. A friendly Frenchman stepped aside to utter a warning against the thieves and footpads that the rebuilding of the city had attracted.

Next day was the last of the journey's sightseeing, and not the least memorable.

Away up to the north, past La Bricque and Potijze, past Boesinghe and to St Julien, was the track of that memorable and desperate counter-attack of the Lahore Division that cost two-thirds of the infantry as casualties.

It did its full share to save Ypres in that fateful April week, and Ypres was counted to be worth a quarter million of British dead.

No one then realised the extent of its success. When one followed over its tracks six years after, one could then see how much ground it had snatched back in the teeth of the overwhelming Hun.

Even after those years the traces were distinct enough. Bones and more bones lay tossed at the plough headlands by the peasant Walloons, "square heads" callous to another race's dead.

Amongst the wide-curved Scythian rib-bones lay the shoddy bandoliers, the obsolete bayonets, and cheap battered water-bottles, thought good enough by the thick-lipped of "behind."

I even saw a rag bearing the lace and scarlet piping of a dead subadar's full-dress coat, which he had worn in the attacking line as a makeshift. Makeshifts become necessary when men are clothed in cotton drill in Flanders winter trenches.

SEVEN YEARS OF WAR AND THE SALT RANGE

SEVEN YEARS OF WAR AND THE SALT RANGE.

THE grubby dusty carriage of the longest railway system in the world had square wheels—at least so it seemed to the young soldier, just back from seven years of miscellaneous campaigning, who clung to the edge of a bunk to prevent himself from going through the roof.

At about midnight, a great clanking of couplings and bumping of buffers showed that the train had drawn up alongside the row of smoky oil-lamps of Campbellpur Junction. On the gritty stone platform a half-dozen blue-chinned, love-locked frontier policemen, with their broad sword-bayonets fixed to their Martini carbines, stood round a handful of heavily-chained prisoners. These were Wazirs taken in some rough-and-tumble amid the stony tangles of the Salt Range in the past night. Their great deep jaws and

gleaming eyes marked them as almost nearer akin to the leopard than to the kindly world of men. Their hard faces recalled to the soldier another night more than five years earlier before Festubert, when a trio of just such mettle harried a patrol of five-and-twenty Westphalians across the No Man's Land back through their own wire.

The train was in no hurry, and the soldier had ample leisure to contrast the silent immobility of the Moslem northerners with the quacking of a party of sleek sensual-featured banias, thinly disguised in the blue serge jackets of ticket inspectors and passenger guards, who soon raised a clamour to extract some illegal gratification from a Jat bumpkin in the next coach. In due season the train moved on with the clatter of a dozen boiler-shops, prodigious whistling and waving of green flags, at the dizzy rate of some twelve miles to the hour. The soldier dreamt that he was back in "Port Arthur," and that the nightly crumping of 5.9's was clanging in splinters against the cauldrons of that erstwhile brewery.

A large youthful face, rather like that of a horse, poked itself through the window as the train drew to a stop, and its owner announced

that the destination had arrived. The owner was the captain's orderly, who, three years before, a puny boy of four foot nothing in stature, had thrust his way into an orderly-room with half a dozen playmates just bigger than himself, demanding to be enlisted. The boys were Khattaks, and even in 1917 lack of size and age were apt to be overlooked when enlisting Khattaks. However, four foot nothing seemed to exceed the bounds that a measuring-stick can be strained to read to, and he was projected into the road-way. Observing that there was another door to the orderly-room, he dodged the Havildar-major and popped in through it, announcing that his father had been killed and that he insisted on being enlisted. After three more ejectments a place was found for him amongst the buglers. Then—it seemed almost in defiance of his superior officers' expressed opinion, and hence of good order and military discipline—he proceeded to grow. In two years' time he had acquired a stature of five foot eleven, a chest measurement of forty, and a shrapnel bullet through that same chest in the barrage that preceded a Turkish counter-attack before Jaffa. From this he was now recuperating by a ten-day

visit to his aged mother, his only surviving relation, and showing his captain the sights of his homeland.

It was four in the morning, and piercingly cold. Before the soldier, his servant, and his orderly were properly out of the train, the inevitable pasty-faced babu waddled up, blithering about the delay. The young Khattak, Niamat, silenced him with three incisive but not actionable words, to the joy of the bystanders, attributing to him an ancestry from Hindustan, perhaps the last insult in the Punjab.

A hawk-faced grey-haired pointsman, clad in the greatcoat of brown blanketing supplied by the railway to its employés, entertained the soldier with the local gossip by the regardless-of-expense coal fire in the twelve by ten station hut.

Seven years of the "King's War," and all the able-bodied men still far away across the sea.

The stalwart Gunners of the Salt Range served their guns by the Caspian shore, the frosty Caucasus, the wilds of Kurdistan, and in the great concreted emplacements of Hong-Kong and Singapur. Lanky cavalry troopers, men from the valley plains these, were en-

gaged with Bolshevik and revolting Arab; whilst scores of thousands of the stubborn thick-set infantrymen, who call these bare stark hills their home, bore the King's burden on their willing shoulders in fifty fields. No talk of "war weariness" here, nor of "engagement for the duration," though every eighth man, enlisted of his own free will, lay in a distant grave.

Meanwhile gangs of desperate raiders, Wazirs, Mahsuds, and Khostwals, harried the tiny stone-walled and towered hamlets of the Indus valleys, where many a childless widow bewailed a grave she had never seen in front of La Bassée, Wieltje, or the Sanniyat.

In an hour young Niamat returned, cajoling and browbeating by turns a slippered and wheezy ancient, whose long hair fell on his shoulders, and who led by the nose three camels of discontented appearance. They seemed to resent being made to work before sun-up, when the morning was far from being properly aired. With sulky scowls and insubordinate groans the gawky beasts folded up their long legs by sections, bending them in all sorts of unexpected directions, and subsided on to the ground. The ancient suddenly produced from nowhere four very ex-

cellent coarse nets, oval in shape, expertly and strongly woven from the fibre of a small tree called "Majari." Into these Niamat and Yakub the servant tumbled the modest belongings of the party—a sleeping-bag, a few brown blankets, a Himalayan snow-porter's basket, full of enamelled plates, mugs, sauce-pans, tins of jam, tea, and packets of cartridges. Then, gathering up the corners, the ancient lashed them together with more fibre, and slung them over the camel's back. To the blue-beaded dignified neck of the senior camel was hitched the inevitable cheap tin American lantern; the two youths shouldered the Mannlicher and the Martini, and the little caravan was soon trudging north by west. The track, just nine inches wide, was nearly but never quite cleared of the interminable shingly stones by the feet of countless camels. In a few minutes the railway signal was out of sight behind one of the many bare backbones of rock that jutted up along the ridges, and nothing except the two rifles and the tin lamp remained to tell the young soldier that he was not travelling in the twelfth century, when Mahmud ruled in Ghazni and took his armies of fair-skinned Nordic westerners over

these ranges to conquer and hand down the land to their progeny who serve the King of England, just as Duke William carved up Saxon England to make fiefs for the Nordic ancestors of their officers.

The chill pearly dawn soon changed to a warmer pink, and the growing light displayed the sharp jagged crests of the ranges on both sides. Yellow sandstone mixed with grey granite and streaked with lines of black formed these stark hills, riven by countless labyrinths of little valleys, shingly as the sea-shore. Here and there a clump of camel-thorn gave a touch of almost indistinguishable green. Yet rarer still, on the brow of some fold in the ground, a little flat-roofed house, built of the same all-pervading round stones, was with difficulty separated by the eye from its surroundings. Just below each homestead a little patch of ground covered with faint parallel lines, still overwhelmed by the flood of stones, showed a struggling attempt at cultivation. Here men with muscles of steel fought with pitiless nature to win each year the few bushels of wheat that sustained their gallant hearts.

In a little enclosure fenced round with cut thorns, a yard high, a busily moving figure in

a knee-long dark blue jumper atop of flowing crimson trousers of immense but graceful width, showed where the wife or widow of some distant Punjabi soldierman fed her chickens or milked the family cow for the gaffer's early breakfast. Everywhere nature in her hardest and most pitiless mood: beetling razor-crested hills; waterless valleys; thorn-trees, thorn bushes, and thorn fence—all under an all-mastering flood of grey stones and boulders.

Only in the smiling gallant faces of the people, their clean aquiline features and steadfast eyes, did one see the other side of the picture. All nature's smoothnesses seemed to have been reft from the land and placed in their merry uncomplaining hearts. The soldier thought of the old glad days when the villages and the battalions still held crowds of laughing young Khattaks and Awans, whose clean-run sinewy limbs and lithe steely forms twisted in dances and Spartan games day in and day out. Then another picture followed, of those same cheery singing lips going to their death to moulder on the close-strung wire before Festubert, or to be engulfed in some swamp of the Rufiji.

Towards noon the track took a turn to

the westward, and dropped down amidst thorn-trees into a sandy ravine that runs down into the great Indus.

On a shoulder jutting out into the stream spread the little cobbled market town of the district: tiny stone-walled houses, with here and there the stall of a cobbler or of a grain-seller, and just on the edge, "between the desert and the sown," the white sharply outlined shrine of the local saint. On one or two knolls a short rifle-shot from the village, the glinting bayonet and khaki uniform of a frontier policeman showed the need for watching against the ever-active raider. A couple of hundred yards from the village a mud rest-house, built for the local police officer visiting his out-stations, afforded a roof to the casual traveller, and here our soldier dumped his few belongings.

A cotton drugget, a wooden springless bedstead strung with webbing, a few crippled chairs and battered enamel plates, made up, with a whitewashed mud wall, what goes for luxury and comfort in the Indian Empire.

A meal and then a stroll round that brought much of interest. Through the little cobbled street of the village the way ran down to the very edge of the huge river, whose waters

washed the walls of the houses. Here the giant ran confined between steep cliffs, making up for his deprivation of elbow-room by a vast swirling depth. On the very nose of the headland a verandahed, stone, single-storey house looked right down into the frigid eddies and whirlpools. This was the new residence of the Khan, for which he had abandoned the near-by ancestral castle with its high loopholed walls and dark rooms topped with the machicolated corner towers. From this his forebears with their steel-capped chain-surcoated tail had swooped down for generations to plunder the fat plains. A minute or two later a bandoliered and sheepskin cloaked policeman came up with an invitation to tea in the Khan's house. The old gentleman sat out in his verandah basking in the glow of the afternoon sun, surrounded by falconers, hooded hawk on wrist, and by shapely greyhounds. The Musalman religion is somewhat strict in the matter of dogs, but in the Northern Punjab, Puritan though it be, sport is a little apt to overshadow religion, so hounds and gun dogs are conveniently exempted from the blight that falls on the rest. Not infrequently does the flashing-eyed sporting cleric of those

parts gather up his robes into a high-peaked saddle and enjoy a gallop after hawk or hare, that he may not be too uncompromising in more ecclesiastical moments.

Gradually the village worthies dropped in, and the talk turned soon to tales of the war. So-and-so had just had a letter months old from a young brother serving in an engine-room up at Murmansk, describing how he had been torpedoed that winter in the North Atlantic. Such a one had a yarn to spin of Japanese at Tsing-tao and the suppressing of the mutiny of an Indian "Hindki" regiment at Singapur, which was promptly capped by a patriarch, who had a tale to tell of the storming of Peking, his company ahead of all the Allied troops, and then the sack of the Summer Palace. A gun-layer brought his audience to far Tibet, assaulting columns blowing in Jong gates, and ten-pounder shrapnel bursting over masses of pigtailed swordsmen. The scene shifted to the Soudan, when Punjabi bayonet outmatched Berber spear in the scorched sandhills outside Suakim, when the "fuzzy-wuzzy" broke a British square, and to a long-forgotten "mission" to the King of Yarkand, when a troop of a famous Corps first carried the Queen's badges

into an uncharted Siberian province. Another old man of the famed Regiment that saved the doubtful day at Ahmed Khel, when the Ghazis swept over the British battalion and up to the muzzles of the forty-pounder elephant guns, hoped for news of his son who had survived the holocaust of the Sanniyat and El Henna, and was now in Kurdistan.

So the talk sped from the bleak wastes of Mongolia to the jungles of Kumasi, and from Flanders, Artois, and Picardy to gun-pits on the Vardar, to the khors of Aden, and the Somali coasts, until the sun dipped in flaming orange over the Afghan hills.

The young soldier strolled slowly back to his simple palliasse with the hospitable salutations of the frontier ringing in his ears, and his mind trying to compass the picture of the débonair youth of this little village spread over half the known globe.

Next day, early in the morning, the party clambered into the heavy-timbered broad ferry-boat, full of exhortations from the Khan's major-domo to keep their weather-eye lifting for Wazir raiders. The ferryman was in no hurry, and he waited for small boys to cajole calves and goats into the

boat; whilst two or three ancient crimson-trousered dames from a Khattak village collected their marketing round them, the dozen or so odd parcels beloved all the world over of old women out shopping.

In due course, with a thrust of his great steering oar, the old ferryman brought the nose of his lumbering craft surging away from the beach into the swirl of the icy river. A steel wire hawser kept her from being whisked away downstream, and the force of the current, together with the nicely judged handling of the boatman's sweep, carried her slowly across.

The passengers sitting about in the decked-in poop soon made each other's acquaintance. An old Hindu, who evidently kept some village shop, his grey hair grown long and tied in the Sikh fashion—a symbol of deference to the strongly expressed views of the frontier on heathenism and idolatry,—produced a large chunk of sugar-candy out of a basket, and offered it politely to the three soldiers.

As the ferry-boat crunched on to the shingle under the cliffs of the right bank, a pair of slim boyish figures ran lightly down to the gunwale, their gold-embroidered, scarlet-tufted sandals scarcely disturbing a stone.

These were two brothers wearing the badges of a Frontier Militia Corps, and in their well-cut khaki coats, with their clean-chiselled almost girlish Nordic features, still beardless, they seemed hardly sixteen years old. They cheerily saluted the young soldier, like automata, with the "may you never be weary" of the Pathan, and explained their service in the Militia by their youth and lack of stature, which kept them out of a Regular Regiment. They were combining business with pleasure—a few days' leave at home, with a bright eye lifting for news of a certain gang of raiders operating in that vicinity.

The Khan had arranged the night before for three more camels, and these met the ferry on the far bank. In charge of them was an old man with a roguish eye, who had spent years camel-driving in Queensland, and still remembered to say, "Mornin', Boss," with a strong Australian accent. The baggage atop of the camels, the wanderers tramped along in the clear morning air up amongst the clean stones and sand of a dry stream-bed, walled in by low cliffs and tumbled rock slides. Everywhere this all-pervading cleanness and newly scoured impression that the frontier hills leave on the senses. Out-

side the alleys of the town everything is pure nature and everything is clean. Had the great god Pan suddenly appeared round a corner of the cliffs, he would have seemed just as much in the picture as a gang of bandoliered marauders.

Gradually the track climbed, always going north by west on to a stony upland that in a less stern land would have been sheep-grazing down.

The sun had begun to warm the air, and the track to descend again, exchanging red sandstone for the grey granite of its former surroundings. A little hollow in the ground held a well, with another beak-nosed, hawk-eyed old man sitting on its brink, anathematising its dryness. There seemed no reason to hurry, and the slow-footed camels were a long way behind, so all hands sat down to sympathise with him.

He was very worried about the newly sunk well, now some thirty feet deep, with nothing but a little damp sand at the bottom. The deeper they dug it, the farther the water-level seemed to sink.

Soon, from a little side-track, another old man turned up, apparently the elder brother of the first. He walked up in an aggrieved

manner, commiserating with himself loudly in having such a worthless brother who could not produce water even out of a thirty-foot well. The younger greybeard, nothing loath, joined issue with him, mixing positive assertion with flat contradiction. The tourney was well under way when Bimbo Major caught sight of the young officer sitting amongst the group. Forthwith apologising for the unseemly behaviour of his cadet, who was now thoroughly crushed, he offered a welcome to their little stone home, a hundred yards away, amongst chickens and thorn fences, and would take no refusal. Soon the whole party were sitting in the guest-room of the little house, the officer in the best chair, and the others on the edge of lacquered-legged bedsteads, strung with an astonishingly fine fibre rope, twisted by the patient fingers of wives and daughters. The two hosts were both, of course, old soldiers, with three sons in the Army, all, as it happened, in Palestine. As the visitors drank milk from bowls of Russian china, requests for news of old regiments and old officers gradually gave way to tales of fighting. Two of the sons of the house had served in the gallant old 6th P. I., now the Royal

Scinde Rifles, in that glorious March day of Neuve Chapelle, when the Rhinelanders were swept out of the village and stubborn North-Country bayonets beat off counter-attack after counter-attack. The talk shifted to old tales of Punjab folklore, and in five minutes the young soldier's astonished ears were listening to a legend of the "preux chevalier," Saleh-ed-din, and his knightly adversary, Richard of England. Such were the gallant stories that served to guide the youthful man-at-arms of the unconquered Salt Range, and keep him bound by the clean laws of the Scythic fighting man. The hearer remembered tiny Belgian children with their hands lopped off at the wrists, and the loathing of his Punjabis at Mongol-Prussian brutishness.

The day was drawing on, so saying good-bye to the cheery old talkative brothers, the party tramped on again over the stones. They caught up the camels as they were clambering down the declivity into a great dry watercourse. By the time the procession had climbed up again to the high ground on the far side the sun was low in the sky, but their destination was in sight, a couple of miles away, in the middle of a shallow

saucer-shaped plain, surrounded by rocky ridges that leapt sharply up like the flanks of great wall-sided cruisers.

During the long day the young soldier remembered having met a number of quietly busy women, small children, and greybeards, but not a single full-grown man. This was food for thought indeed. The seventh year of the war, and the surviving manhood of these gallant valleys still far away, fighting unsung battles with Turk, Arab, Bolshevik, and Mahsud, whilst pampered conscripts talked of their rights.

The night halt was made in the granite-walled, steel-gated, loopholed police post that is the hub of the half-dozen scattered hamlets that occupy the plain of Shakardarra, "the vale of sweetness." The sub-inspector of police, himself an Awan from farther north, made the travellers welcome, and lost no time in explaining that the bottom had fallen out of his world for the time being. He had heard by that morning's post of his failure in his examination for promotion to inspector.

Not without some cause does the Punjabi loathe the sickly "conscientious-objector" type of book-learning that has spread itself like a plague over Hindustan, and now gnaws

at his own land. It takes a race of stout stamina to withstand the moral undermining of the board school, and the bemedalled Punjabi husbandman does not enjoy the sight of his young sons sitting at the feet of a thick-lipped, yellow-eyed, down-country school teacher to suck in the contents of " decadent " school-books.

This sentiment is not lost on the parasite class, the blood-sucking usurers and sons of usurers, and fathers of Conference delegates, who turn it to their own advantage. The least positions in the swarming official ants'-nest are the prize of examination passers, and every sticky palm that handles public money is on the hand of one of the parasites.

Next morning visitors began to drop in—grizzled havildars and naiks, with an occasional white-haired pensioned officer from each of the old frontier regiments. From the mouth of each came the cheery salutation of the borderland, welcoming the visitor to their country with the courtesy of a marquis of the " ancien régime."

By the time the tea was brewed in the Russian teapot and the cigarettes were being passed round, a dozen patriarchal but straight-backed old gentlemen were sitting round the

room on three-legged chairs, boxes, and bags, inquiring after the fate of a nephew last heard of in Flanders, a son in East Africa or Palestine, or a young brother in Mesopotamia. Not one seemed to think it at all unusual or even a matter for comment that every able-bodied young man should still be overseas in 1921, or that the numbers of killed in the old frontier regiments should be the greatest in the Army. Incidentally, the soldier bethought him that the percentages of voluntarily-enlisted men killed from these three unassuming districts of Attock, Jhelum, and Rawalpindi were at least twice as great as those of any county in England. Then a picture came up in his mind of two young Punjabi girls, who, fired by the example of their brothers, bribing a doctor, enlisted in a Sikh regiment. Contrasted with this was another. In the same week "tribunals" assembled, before which able-bodied white civilians of the district claimed "total exemption." The great German offensive was even then on the stocks, and Russia had tumbled into ruin. Several districts of Hindustan, holding each a million souls, had even gone so far as to provide a recruit apiece, for non-combatant service, be it well under-

stood. The Great Indian War Effort did not cease at that, for some devoted administrations, after months of talk, identified their high ideals with certain labour corps, at treble the emoluments of the "mercenary" Punjabi soldier. They certainly deserved high pay, for had not they exacted a promise that they should never be employed under fire? Brain power always commands a higher reward than mere cannon fodder, and were they not organised and raised by the civil power, at the expense of the home taxpayer?

Early next morning the young soldier rose, guided by half a dozen small boys and old greybeards, and clambered over the sharp rocks of one of the steep ridges that overlooked the hamlet. Three hours' toil, rifle in hand, now over shingly torrent beds, now up rocky scarps, resulted in a shameful miss at a fine big ram that carried a head of fully thirty-two inches.

Old Arsala Khan, who directed the stalk, was too polite to say what he thought, but he looked reproachful enough to abash a Bolshevik commissar. So it was a less sprightly party that got back to the little stone post in time for tea. Another traveller had arrived by then, who occupied a spare

mouths on a pension of a few shillings a month, less than a merchant in Calcutta or a Deputy Secretary in Simla pays to feed his dogs.

When business was ended, and the quiet widows, gathering up their children, had passed out to their homes, a cavalryman came in, one of the very few enlisted from that valley. He was a dafadar, invalided from shell wounds, of one of those regiments that the Carrollian nomenclature delights to call "Bengal Lancers," as if they had some connection with Bengal, or Bengal with the Army. His last fight had been Gouzeaucourt, where his Brigade, alongside the Guards, had filled the gap left by a couple of panic-stricken divisions of other mettle. Tales like this filled the long evening round the blazing fire of thorn logs, and it was long past their usual bedtime when the last of the old gentlemen tottered away home.

The young soldier had better luck with the sheep next morning, and brought a useful young ram home, and it was not long before hunks of mutton were roasting in a dozen near-by houses. Leave was drawing to a close, and the cold morning after saw the soldier on the move again, still westwards,

to hit the main frontier road that skirts the "administrative" border, beyond which the King's writ does not run. Three hours over rocky ridges, along goat-tracks, and at the bottom of tumbled, dry, torrent beds led suddenly round a corner to a graceful little white-washed shrine topped by a dome of the cleanest outline, whose atmosphere brought back that of the tiny grey granite churches of some remote parish in Wiltshire or Devon. Its guardian was quite ready for a little talk, and an hour passed before the party resumed their tramp. Soon more hills led down to the broad white dusty road, overlooked by a crag of rock. Amongst the boulders of this there reclined four cheerful greybeards, armed with Martinis, who kept watch for the comings and goings of raiders—an honorary duty allocated to them in turn by the votes of the district.

Once on the main road the milestones showed but five miles to Lachi, a little post town of the border, where a conveyance could be hired to Kohat. The party had scarcely covered a mile, when the sound of wheels was heard, and a two-wheeled, hooded trap pulled up, its wiry nags streaming with sweat. Out from the shandrydan there hopped

a curious figure of fun, whip in hand, with an extraordinarily ugly though cheery face. He seized the young soldier by the arm, and without a word whisked him into the front seat of the trap. Niamat and Yakub climbed into odd corners; the driver, still dumb, sat on the step; another passenger remarked curtly that the soldier could not, of course, be allowed to walk, and the whole circus rattled off towards Lachi. At this metropolis an old gentleman, a squireen of those parts, with a long grey beard and a piercing blue eye, an old cavalry officer, seized the traveller again and sat him down before a large brass tray of biscuits, samovar, and fruit in the Post Office, whose official business was suspended to do honour to the guest.

Small boys and ancient serving-men flew and hobbled back and forth on various missions, now to collect apples, now for some more tea, and now to get ready a conveyance for the drive into Kohat.

Meanwhile the old officer demanded news of older colonels of his acquaintance. Where was Colonel Fitzblood, who commanded the 11th Punjab Infantry on the ridge before Delhi, in the Great War? Where were Daly and Keyes and Wilde? It took a little ex-

plaining to make it clear to the old man that the Reaper who had spared his silver locks had gathered in many an old soldier to his fathers. In the middle of all this a phenomenon appeared, a young able-bodied man, a junior N.C.O., straight home on leave from his regiment on the Russian frontier. By this time the trap was ready, and the visitors, bundling themselves in and to a chorus of "staremashayes," drove off, the young soldier thrilled with the pride of a new appreciation of the gallant race it was his good fortune to serve with: a pride mingled with a regret that such a race, Scythian Nordics, cousins of his own, should be threatened with extinction by a fungus of Orientalised bureaucracy, a Dravidian wave infiltrating from the eastward, from degenerate Hindustan. He thought of whitened bones lying in pride of place far ahead of the British line, on the slopes of Aubers and on the ridges by St Julien.

For the real racial frontier between Europe and Asia is not where a pedantic Chenovnik has stuck up a tricoloured barber's pole on the Ural slopes or in far Lenkoran, but on the Sutlej watershed, on the passes of Baltistan or the untrodden Mariong Pamir, in

distant Khurasan, in the rugged foothills of Kasbek, where Aryan Georgian struggles with Mongol Turk; and finally, on the banks of the Niemen and the Vistula, in the North Ukraine, and amongst Lettish lakes and the tundras of Finmark. These are the tracts that divide the Nordic of Western Europe, Persia, Afghanistan, and the Punjab from the Mongol of Prussia, Muscovy, Finland, and Angora, and from the base Dravidian of Hindustan, and from the sons of Ham, of Sind, and the Gulf shores.

FOUR NIGHTS IN THE POPE'S NOSE

FOUR NIGHTS IN THE POPE'S NOSE.

THE second battle of Ypres, with its memories of evil chlorine gas, had not long since passed us by, and had been followed by the murderous spun-out fighting of Richebourg and Festubert.

This had left but few survivors in the battalion; some whose memories carried them back to Neuve Chapelle and Givenchy, and a handful who could recall ancient days of the first battle of Ypres, when whole companies died in their tracks on the Messines Ridge.

We had passed through the era of frozen mud and shells, and were entering upon one of bronze-wing flies and still more shells. Reliefs were almost unknown, and when they did occur, we merely shifted from one part of the line to another. Every day the shells and bombs took their toll; occasionally a

few men whose wounds had healed came up with the evening ration party, or, rarer still, a small draft from some strange regiment added its quota to the medley in the battalion, without adding much to its strength. The division had the highest percentage of killed of any on the British front.

It was in consequence of one of these quaint reliefs that we found ourselves in support of the Dogras and Khattaks of another company in a support trench that we had dug ourselves some two or three weeks before all through a night in which the air had seemed almost viscous with lead and iron. Support trenches were a rarity in those days, and their inhabitants the objects of no little envy, as they enjoyed a respite from grenades of every species and from trench mortars. Since the Westphalians across the way seldom fired H.E. at night between battles, and since we had a not ill-founded belief that they would never again have the stomach to face our fifteen rounds rapid, this meant that we could often sleep all the night through, untroubled but for the "Germano kashar wror" (the small brother of the German), as the Rabelaisian Pathan called him.

This oasis in the desert of T.N.T. of which

I speak lay nearly eighty yards behind the front line, and some sixty yards in front of a notorious "crump trap," known to fame as Port Arthur. I think, though, that the original "303 metre hill" would have turned green with envy could it have seen its godchild at about that time.

The front line formed the left of a distinct salient: straight ahead the Boche line, with its gay-coloured sandbags, lay two hundred yards away; on our right No Man's Land narrowed down to a width of seventy, a great deal of which was filled with the enemy's wire.

It was here that the enemy had formed a false front line, and here on the fatal 9th of May that some of the other division of our corps had broken through, only to find themselves in a rectangular open space swept by unscathed machine-guns from the front and both flanks, so that in several battalions which left their trenches with seven hundred bayonets six hundred fell in a few minutes of Inferno. Here the corpses of Punjabi, Pathan, and Garhwali Rajput mouldered on the close-strung wire and choked the foul sluggish stream.

In Richebourg, just to the right, our feeble

time-shrapnel had harmed neither the rows upon rows of thumb-thick German wire nor the reinforced concrete of their machine-gun emplacements.

Our front line now was the old German support line, out of which another Punjab battalion had turned the Boche in March.

A relic of this was the Pope's Nose, formerly a communication trench, with a parapet on the side to our left and shallow dug-outs on the right.

Much shelling had reduced it to a groove scarcely three feet deep; on the right it was almost entirely open to a cross machine-gun fire; it was raked by "rifle batteries" and machine guns day and night, while a pair of light trench mortars were always ready to lob their hateful bombs into the open "amphitheatre" at the end. This space had evidently been a sort of "Charing Cross," where several trenches met. It was within hand-grenade throw of a bulge in the enemy front line, notable for seven fixed periscopes which glared down on to any one crawling about in the mud of the "amphitheatre."

We had built this up to form a listening-post, and it was held now by a small party

THE POPE'S NOSE.

Looking towards the Bois du Biez from the British parapet.

of seven Dogras belonging to the company just in front of us, whose job it was to maintain our ascendancy in No Man's Land.

On our second afternoon in this delectable spot, after a quiet day, we were roused by the hellish crashes of big howitzer shells bursting in salvos close at hand. A glance over the top showed that the Hun had taken a sudden dislike to the Pope's Nose, and was plastering it with five-nines in no uncertain manner.

The triple spouts of ruddy fumes and black smoke roaring up with scarcely an interval made the ground quake, and showed us that bad trouble lay ahead.

Hastening up into the firing line to meet the commander of the Dogra company, in case the Hun should be tempted beyond his strength, we found the salvos falling only just clear of the parapet and a battered party of Dogras returning from their sap, the havildar brandishing a tin periscope with more holes in it than any colander. The piquet had been buried, fortunately for them only lightly, by the first sudden burst, and had been dug out in the nick of time. The "hate" ended as suddenly as it had begun, leaving us gazing dizzily at a set of

reeking craters in the place where our laboriously built up sap had been. The Boche made no move, and our casualties were but slight, but the brigade lost no time in telling us to get on with the war and to build up a new parapet to the post as conspicuously as possible, so as to tempt the Westphalian howitzer merchants to a further display. The next morning, they said, several hundred nice new sandbags would be brought up, accompanied by a small party of sappers. In a word, the Pope's Nose was to be converted into a sort of "Aunt Sally," and we strongly suspected that we should fill the rôle of the pipe in the lassie's mouth. Men were cheap and shells were scarce in those days. We pointed out that the German Foot Artillery was, it was well known, receiving a large number of hastily trained recruits about this time, and that it was more than likely that some flustered and half-baked "number" might put his correction the wrong way on the range dial, thereby incommodating us in the trench to no little extent. However, as usual, the man on the spot was not listened to, and so the long day wore on.

Next morning we changed places with the

Dogras, whose officers seemed to us to wear a fiendishly pleased expression; in the afternoon a sapper havildar turned up with several loads of bags and a little band of engineering experts. He seemed a cool quiet fellow, and there seemed every hope for the success of his share of the job. We had decided to fill up the bags during the afternoon under cover in the main trench; taking care not to arouse the Huns' anger by letting patrols out to examine his wire, or by allowing our unscrupulous battalion machine-gun officer to discharge his quaint old brass-jacketed veterans of four campaigns in their direction. He was fond of doing this on most evenings, in order to see if he could get away with a belt without some portion of the ancient pieces falling off.

Nor were the Afridis in the next company allowed their evening Bisley; they had not got out of the habit of considering the bickering in France, with its free, gratis, and abundant rifle ammunition, as practice for the real thing (*i.e.*, going home on leave).

The bags being ready filled, the Mahratta sappers were to crawl, when it was dark, on their bellies through the loose earth of the craters to the "amphitheatre," where, hold-

ing their breath, to avoid breaking in on the cogitations of the sentries opposite, they would pile their bags in correct Kirkee style to a great height. The bags were to be passed up by the "jawans" of the company, who were spread out all down the sap. The only men that would be left in the trench itself would be the subaltern, the usual sentries, and the signallers on the telephone. Since the company was now only sixty strong, as the result of the past three months, it was necessary to take some risks and to use every possible man so as to get the job over quickly.

According to plan we set out after dark, every man with two filled bags, his rifle, and with many *sotto-voce* imprecations in Doric Punjabi concerning the weight.

A steady crawl through the mud took us up the Stygian furrow. The half-dozen sappers found their bearings in the "amphitheatre," and a steady stream of bags soon commenced to flow towards them.

The usual supply of bullets came cracking down the sap and thudding into the remains of the parapet on our left, but though a couple of men were hit by the time we started work, there was nothing to show that the

enemy's sentries had taken alarm. In fact, a good number of the bullets came lobbing in from our right rear, where there was no cover; they were evidently being fired by the British regiment in the next brigade farther up the line. A few Véry lights, too, went up, but no more than usual in those parts. It seemed too good to hope for that we should work the night through without coming in for some frightfulness, especially as one or two of the men were barely ten yards from where the enemy's sentries must be, and every time a light went up it appeared as if every man's fingers could be counted under the ghastly glare.

For some time, as it seemed to us hours, all went well, and lying in the deep mud we could see the wall of bags gradually growing higher under the swift hands of the sappers.

One or two of them had just started to work with their shovels on the shell-thrown earth, to improve the lie of the bags, when there was a slight commotion behind. A minute later a crawling form announced itself in a husky whisper as the sapper subaltern in charge of that part of the line, who had come up to see how the work was progressing. Having satisfied himself that all was well,

we both lay down and prayed that the Boche would not hear the shovels.

Occasionally a flare went up near at hand, and on the German wire every devilish barb stood out, so near was it. Here and there the tumbled parapet showed incongruous torn rags of calico, where our bullets had ripped their tawdry sandbags. Their periscopes bristled over the edge, and it seemed that each held a vulture eye that could pierce one's very vitals through the gloom. Every now and then the battered black outline of the wood behind the German trenches showed up ghost-like in the lightning flash of some random shell. In the tossed earth to our right the teeth of a month-dead corpse grinned and glistened under every light.

Suddenly there was a hoarse "My God! What's that?" from the sapper subaltern. A dull thudding report like a cough just to our left front and a few faint sparks like a thrown cigarette seemed to fly straight up from the enemy's breastwork. We knew too well what this meant; a few moments that seemed weeks of frozen terror, and then a thunder-clap, an eye-searing flash, the reek of detonated Trotyl, and the gasps of some wretched victim. Even those hardened trench

rats, who looked forward to a clean and wholesome bullet, turned sick at the sights and sounds of a trench-mortar bomb well placed. A moment's breathless pause, and the stout hearts of the jawans brought them back to their toil again. Scarcely had the fumes cleared away, and the torn wounded been passed quietly back into the trench, than a second bomb soared up towards us. This time the Hun fired a Véry light from each side of his mortar, in order to hide the train of sparks by dazzling our eyes with the glare. This round fell too far behind us to do any damage, but from then on through the night our foul blood-soaked pit became a very Sheol. With maddeningly timed precision the vile bombs came up over the thirty-five yards that lay between their emplacement and us.

Very soon the enemy broke up the brain-wracking wait between rounds by firing rifle grenades, which at such a target were scarcely preferable. All the time, bullets, some like giant whip-cracks fired from a score yards away, others thudding down from a mile distant, took their toll of the wasting company. After the first few tearing roars of the bombs, the nightmare-like tension seemed to relax

in one's brain, as it so often does when the anticipation, the shriek of the long-range shell, or the rising cracks of the traversing machine-gun, gives place to the volcano of the burst and the drum-strokes of men hit through the body.

The very shortness of the range saved us a good deal; a mortar fired at a very steep angle sends its bomb up high, and a little turns it aside. Nevertheless, more than one fell right into the trench. Several times the bombs burst so close that one's brain, bludgeoned by the blow of the detonation, could not receive the message of the report from the ear.

After long enduring in this devil's bowling alley, it seemed to us that our sandbag task was nearly finished. I say "it seemed," because one's battered senses could scarcely do anything so definite as seeing or thinking in the pauses of grovelling in frozen terror in the loathly mud of the sap. Just then the maddening hammer-blows of the mortar gave way to a slightly louder discharge; the heavy bomb, with its fiery tail, sailed straight up directly towards us. There came a thud not five feet away, and the sizzle of a fuse in the mud. Blind and dumb we waited,

bereft even of thought for what must be the end. . . . Æons passed; one's eyes could not see the foul sights around; one's ears could not hear the din, nor one's body feel the touch of the slime. After a long time the senses came back little by little, the thud of a bullet, the clink of a shovel, and the sheen of a distant flare seemed to be the first happenings of a new birth. The bomb had not burst.

The wall was by now high enough to be conspicuous to the enemy, and the first light of dawn was not far off, so we crawled back to our trench, tired, and more than a little tucked up, for the morning "stand to." Before curling down for the longed-for sleep we found one man to see to, whom the stretcher-bearers had not yet carried away. He was a young Yusafzai, whose shin-bone was protruding in a nasty manner. He was grateful enough for the two little white tabloids put under his tongue, tablets one had learnt by now to carry at all times. His leg in splints, most of us turned in and slept in oblivion of the morning "hate"—a heavyish pasting of eight-inch stuff in and around Port Arthur, a hundred yards behind.

The enemy seemed to take our obtrusive

erection of sandbags quite quietly until about four in the afternoon. Then the storm broke. Salvo upon salvo of the same shrieking bellowing five-nines tore up the stale earth of our wretched sap. The four men of the piquet, looking somewhat startled, crept back into the trench, and our work was to do again. Sandbags were scarce in those days, and had to be specially arranged for, so nothing much could be done that night. However, it was up to us to make good the ground and the cluster of craters where our piquet had been. The "amphitheatre" was wiped out as far as one could see by crawling up the remains of the sap. The vestige of a traverse still remained to mark the junction of the two, and we determined to make this into the best sort of listening-post possible. There had been a land-mine or *fougasse* under the "amphitheatre" connected by a cable to an electric exploder in our trench. We could not rely on this, though, to stop a bombing attack up the sap, as the leads were pretty sure to have been cut by the shelling, and in any case it was too passive a way of dealing with the situation.

Fortunately, we had several steel loophole shields, really good ones, taken from the

enemy a short time before. After dark a small party wormed its way up the sap, scooped out a hollow just behind the ruined traverse, and placed two of the shields on the top, covering them over with clods and sacking so as not to catch the eye. This protected the piquet from the raking fire of the rifle batteries, and as they lay very flat in the hollow, the short-range bullets from their right front and flank went over them. They were hardly worried during the night; there was some activity in No Man's Land just to their left, and a few rifle grenades were fired, but no damage done. There were two bombers in the post, with two dozen home-made "jam-tins," which was practically all that the company owned in these penurious days. However, the Hun did not venture over, as he certainly should have done had he been worth his salt, in order to get a footing close up to our trench, from which he could fire his mortars into our front line itself. We had no rifle grenades, and so could not even retaliate to this extent.

The piquet lay out all through the day. Early in the afternoon there appeared to be a certain liveliness. A red and indignant

face pushed its way into the company headquarter dug-out, waking up the drowsy occupants by the indignation it expressed. It kept on expressing indignation for a long time without repeating itself, until mollified by the offer of rum. A *modus vivendi* thus arrived at, the owner of the face, a field officer of engineers, explained that in making his way along the trenches on our right he had turned up into our sap. Almost at once he had perceived the wisdom of proceeding farther on his belly. Thus he bumped into the piquet and inquired all about it. The commander of the piquet then became scathing, indeed caustic, on the subject of attracting Hun attention by bringing a well-fed corporation up a shallow sap in daylight so that the southern aspect of the said corporation showed above the edge, and, further, of talking in a gin-and-fog whisper, with the enemy only ten yards away. Field officers are notoriously shy of taking advice from mere privates, especially when the private goes in for Punjabi sarcasm; in consequence, it took a good deal of rum to smooth out matters.

The Major had scarcely taken his leave when another node of profanity was seen

in the offing making its way up "Hun Street," our communication trench. This resolved itself into a very young and pink-faced second-lieutenant of artillery brandishing a sumptuously upholstered prismatic periscope, and accompanied by a sad-eyed bombardier wound round in tangles of telephone-wire so that he closely resembled a cocoon. When the young officer reached the trench, the soldiery soon perceived what arm he adorned, and commenced to sniff; their experience of "artillery support" having been somewhat unfortunate. They even alleged that certain batteries, designated as "Vipers," were not really neutral, but gave us more than our fair share. Indeed, only a few nights before, my own orderly had been slightly hit by a more or less spent shrapnel bullet, which, he alleged, came from a mountain battery lurking in our rear. In the morning the gunner F.O.O. looked into our trench as usual, on his way to relieve his brother subaltern, with a view to taking something against snake-bites. We said to the orderly, "Saiyad Ali, fetch the whisky." He moved off towards the dug-out, then turned about, returned, saluted punctiliously, and said in an aggrieved voice, "Sahib, we have been giving this

officer whisky for four mornings running, and the result is that he bursts his shells over our trench; just look at my arm."

However, the very young subaltern soon got about his business, which was to find some suitable spot to observe from with his nice new periscope. The fly in the ointment was the inability of the bombardier to secure telephonic communication with any one else than people who cursed him violently. After an hour or so, the gunner-child drifted towards the company dug-out, where his worries melted away under the mellifluous rivulet from the jar marked "S.R.D." He became genial, lost his schoolboy shyness, and then the great idea struck the infantry. No word passed between us, it just happened. Said we to him, passing the rum bottle, "Young fellow-me-lad, tonight there's dirty work to hand." "Oh!" said he, lapping it up. "Yes, indeed, tonight we go forth into the Pope's Nose to mend the wretched place. Don't you think you might poop off a couple of rounds at the place where there are two T.M.'s which worry us very much indeed?"

This rather took his breath away. Before

he had properly got it back, "P." gave him some more rum, wherein, unbeknownst, was some "vin blanc." The idea of two whole rounds of 18-pounder shrapnel being loosed off by a mere second-lieutenant (or wart) had staggered him. But the rum did good work; it was good rum, such as is not known in these days. We pointed out that only two rounds were wanted; we had located the Minnies to an inch, and their emplacement was blatantly open and unprotected. It took still more rum before he would consent to expend these two shells. The shades of night drew on. The sandbags were being filled once more; the company filed up into the gullet of the sap. Sure enough the gunner-child, well ginned up, breathed his jargon down the telephone; there was a lazy "woosh-bang," and two real live percussion shrapnel burst among the Hun sandbags. There was a sound as of gas leaving a ripped balloon; the entire Imperial and Royal German Army gasped at our impertinence. Still the company scurried up the sap, laid its sandbags, and was back in the main trench with hardly a shot fired at it. All was quiet, but the sap was

only about one-tenth done. Back in the dug-out, with its roof made of a broken pig-sty door, the gunner-child was saying good-night to "P." The dangle of more rum, however, made him pause. Still more blandishment and more rum, again mixed with "vin blanc," induced him to fire two more rounds. More rushing up the sap, and more sandbags laid without bloodshed. Then the gunner-child had a fit of remorse. Visions of the Major tearing his (the gunner-child's) liver out began to swim before his eyes. The bombardier preserved a discreet silence, and received a share of the rum. More smooth suave talk and the rattle of an enamelled mug produced another two rounds with its quota of safely laid sandbags. On and on through the night the cycle was repeated. Rum, plausible cozening speech, more rum, shells, sandbags. Somewhere towards midnight we even procured a couple of H.E.'s, heaven knows how. When dawn broke the sandbag wall was finished, so was six months' allowance of the battery's ammunition, half a jar of rum, and several bottles of "vin blanc." The stretcher-bearers saw the gunner home; the bombardier, who had a high

coefficient of absorption, was crooning gently to himself. There was talk of a ripping rending sound having been heard at about breakfast-time near where the battery lived. We never saw the gunner-child again.

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